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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

ENGENDERING GENRE: VICTORIAN POETRY AND THE WOMAN QUESTION

BY

SUSAN IRENE BROWN

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
AND RESEARCH IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

EDMONTON, ALBERTA
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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled Engendering Genre: Victorian Poetry and the Woman Question submitted by Susan Irene Brown in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

The Victorian period witnessed extensive generic innovation in poetry concurrent with widespread upheaval in accepted notions of gender roles and relations in what was called the Woman Question; this study traces the interconnection of gender and genre and their relation to social change. Chapter One considers theories of generic change and offers a model of literary subjectivity which acknowledges the ideological work performed by representations. Chapter Two examines the tension between *Bildungsroman* and heterosexual romance in narrative poetry as part of the growing controversy in Victorian England over the ontological status of women. The conflict between gendered literary inscriptions of subjectivity evident in Mary Ann Browne's *Ignatia* and Arthur Hugh Clough's *The Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich* is largely resolved by Elizabeth Barrett Browning's subversion of romance in *Aurora Leigh*. The form of Romantic subjectivity celebrated by that poem is challenged, however, by the female-authored closet dramas discussed in Chapter Three. George Eliot's "Armgart," Menella Bute Smedley's "Lady Grace," and Augusta Webster's *A Woman Sold* employ dramatic form to represent women as speakers and agents while also emphasizing social constraints. Chapter Four considers Dante Gabriel Rossetti's "Jenny" and Webster's "A Castaway" as participants in the shift in discourses of sexuality which took place in the campaign to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts. The implications of these analyses for the study of gender, genre, and Victorian poetry are suggested in Chapter Five, which presents a re-reading of Robert Browning's "Pompilia" and of Julia Kristeva's theory of a revolution in poetic language. This study concludes that generic upheaval and Bakhtinian novelization in much Victorian poetry is symptomatic and productive of the emergence of a female political subject who was split between an assertion of independent, equal selfhood and a recognition of social determinacy. As a whole, the study argues that genre is thoroughly, interconstitutively, enmeshed with the social order and, accordingly, deeply implicated in the construction and maintenance of the gendered systems of representation which constitute subjects within ideology.

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This thesis is dedicated to the memories of Dorothy Brown, Kate Louise Berry, and William G. Berry.

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INTRODUCTION

Innovations in poetry, or even conventions when pressed to their logical limits, cause the ordinary critic to despair.

-John Crowe Ransom

Victorian feminist Josephine Butler relates in her memoirs a revealing interaction she had with the Prefect of the Service des Moeurs, or Morals Police, of Paris in 1874. She was visiting the city to observe a system of regulating prostitution similar to that being gradually implemented in Britain through the Contagious Diseases Acts, and raised, in the course of her interview, some of her objections to such a system. Butler describes Prefect Lecour as "shallow, vain, talkative" and a poor arguer, adding that "he has a certain dramatic cleverness" (Personal Reminiscences 124). Lecour at first responds to Butler politely if patronizingly, but finds his voluble answers neither appease her nor stem the tide of questions. He becomes flustered and annoyed when Butler asserts the "equality of guilt" of both sexes involved in prostitution, and, abandoning logical argument, resorts to representation:

> He then acted, in the most disagreeable manner, an imaginary scene between a poor woman, a temptress, and a young man. He seemed to think that I was an ignoramus, and that this would convert me. He described in the old, hackneyed, sentimental manner, with which we are familiar, an 'honourable young man' dining out, partaking un peu généreusement of wine; a girl meets him, marks his unsteady gait--and then he acted how she would place her arm in his and tempt him. There was no comparison, he said, between the two; the man was simply careless; the woman was a deliberate, determined corrupter. (128-29)

The Prefect resorts to the little drama because it naturalizes and authorizes the values that he cannot otherwise adequately defend. Butler's account of it, however, reminds the reader that the narrative Lecour dramatizes is not the only one in circulation at that time. That a prostitute in 1874 can be understood either as "a poor woman" or as "a temptress" illustrates the disparity between different Victorian discourses of sexuality; and the implied narrative which Butler would oppose to this "familiar" and "sentimental" one reveals that the nineteenth-century debate over fallen women and prostitution was in part a clash of conflicting narratives. Prefect Lecour also recognizes the existence of divergent constructions of sexuality, but compartmentalizes them according to genre. Following his dramatic performance and his assertion that "women continually injure honest men, but no man ever injures an honest woman," Butler reminds him that he himself has written of "wives and honest girls injured by immoral and depraved men" (129). He responds: "Ah, yes, but all that belongs to the region of romance; I am only speaking of what can be recognised and forbidden by the police. The police cannot touch the region of romance; nor can the State" (129-30). Lecour thus employs generic boundaries to define his jurisdiction. Romance, he seems to suggest, has little to do with the reality of policing sexuality. But, paradoxically, Lecour buttresses his position not through logic, facts, and figures, but through a fiction he claims represents the truth. Moreover, Butler's rhetorical strategy is similar, for she discredits Lecour's drama as an outmoded literary genre, "old, hackneyed, sentimental," which only an "ignoramus" would mistake for a true representation.

This incident in the Service des Moeurs suggests strongly that genre was deeply implicated in Victorian constructions of sexuality. In its convergence on the sexual politics of genre, the dispute between Butler and Lecour encapsulates what this study attempts to demonstrate: that representation plays a fundamental role in the construction and maintenance of categories of gender, and that transformation of these categories depends as much or more on changes in representational practices than on logical demonstration. In the words of Mary Jacobus, "sexual difference can be viewed as textual . . . . instituted by and in language" (Reading Woman 4). My purpose here is to trace one aspect of the connection between textuality and sexuality by focusing on the interrelation of literary and social change. My topic is the significance of a simultaneous flux in poetic genres and a widespread debate over the position of women which occurred in the Victorian period.

The "Woman Question," as it was often called, encompasses the period from around the 1840s when, as Sheila Rowbotham writes, the "connection between social revolution and the liberation of women had been made," through to the 1880s.[1] By mid-century, individual protests and occasional attention to the economic, legislative, intellectual, and social issues surrounding the position of women had become the focus of widespread concern and organized opposition. In the decades that followed, the organization spread and multiplied; so did the debate, which came to include, to borrow Augusta Webster's satiric catalogue, "the theory of marriage, Adam and Eve, ministering angels, Tennyson's Princess, physiology, psychology, and things in general" ("Parliamentary franchise" 341). Despite the virtual absence of the Woman Question from histories of the period, the scope and seriousness of the questions asked had a fundamental impact which is well summarized by Theodore Roszak:

---

[1] Rowbotham, Women, Resistance and Revolution 58. This is not, of course, to suggest that there has not always been a "woman question" to a greater or lesser extent in western societies. That the question seems constant yet ever-shifting, and ever excluded from political and literary history, is a mark of the crucial function of gender in the cultural construction of life, and an index of how marginalized that function is in our narratives of that construction. The Victorian Woman Question inherited much from the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Hannah More; Smallwood's bibliography provides a sense of the scope of the debates between 1680 and 1760. Anthologies of material from the Victorian controversy include the three-volume work The Woman Question edited by Helsinger, Lauterbach, and Sheets; Bauer and Ritt's Free and Ennobled Women; and Murray's Strong-Minded Women; for a recent reading of the relationship between the Woman Question and Victorian notions of history, see Christina Crosby's The Ends of History.

> By the late nineteenth century . . . this supposedly marginal curiosity called the 'woman problem' had become one of the most earth-shaking debates in the Western world, fully as explosive an issue as the class or national conflicts of the day. . . . One would be hard pressed to find many major figures of the period in any cultural field who did not address themselves passionately to the rights of women. (87-88)

Different aspects of the debate of course took precedence at different moments. In the 1840s and 1850s the position of a great number of unmarried or "redundant" women, whose existence was indicated by census findings, was a major source of concern. At mid-century, women began to agitate for greater employment opportunities, admission to the professions, and improved education. By the late sixties, the sexual exploitation of women in prostitution became a much greater issue. These and other issues were intimately related in the minds of many women, as the following analysis of prostitution by Annie Besant demonstrates:

> Remunerative employment would half empty the streets; pay women, for the same work, the same wages that men receive; let sex be no disqualification; let women be trained to labor, and educated for self-support; then the greatest of all remedies will be applied to the cure of prostitution, and women will cease to sell their bodies when they are able to sell their labor. (7)

The period also saw increasing emphasis placed on formal equality in law and political process, with the campaign for married women's property rights leading eventually to demands for female franchise.

Concurrent with the interrogation of categories of gender in the Woman Question, was a continuing upheaval of categories of genre in Victorian poetry. Alistair Fowler considers this "the most prolific of all literary periods in experimentation with genre" (Kinds of Literature 206). Whereas I have no interest here in extolling the Victorian period over, for example, twentieth-century claims to the same honour, I do argue for the significance of the conjunction of an upheaval in formal literary representation and a crisis in definitions of and relations between the sexes, as well as for a significant continuity of this conjunction into twentieth-century writing. I focus on poetry because, in the broadest sense, poetry affords greater formal scope than prose--the texts studied here cover the spectrum from lyric to dramatic to narrative to epic--and, as a more generally more traditional mode, poetry seems to display more clearly its allegiances to and departures from generic norms than the polyglot novel, which absorbs many different forms. In addition, debate over connections between Victorian poetry and social change needs stimulus, whereas substantial work has been and is being done to map this terrain for the Victorian novel. Yet Victorian poetry represents a test case rather than the circumference of my study: the more general conclusions I offer regarding the interconnection of gender and genre extend beyond the texts and period I consider here.

For my exploration of the conjunction of gender and genre I have chosen mixed, transgressive, unstable, or transitional generic forms. Even the Bildungsroman, which is the partial focus of Chapter Two, enjoys this liminal status to the extent that a recent summary of criticism of the genre asserts that there is "widespread doubt . . . about the status of the existence of the genre" (John H. Smith 207). I focus on these, rather than on examples of more conventional or unified genres, for two basic reasons. Firstly, this is a study of change: both of social change and how it is interwoven with literature, and of literary change and how it transmits, transmutes, or helps effect material transformation. Secondly, since genres are not fixed, mixed forms make it easier to perceive the boundaries and implications of particular categories through the juxtaposition of diverse and conflicting elements.

While the texts under consideration here range from long narrative works to dramatic monologues, they have in common participation in literary and social discourses which are in the process of transformation. Put another way, the works in which I am interested here are all in one way or another "dialogized" or "novelized" to adopt key concepts from Mikhail Bakhtin. In his idiosyncratic notion, generic features which result from a literary work's participation (inevitable, but of varying degrees) in social debate constitute "novelization," regardless of whether the text is written as prose, verse, or drama. Bakhtin's analysis of the preoccupations of the novel also points to another shared feature of the texts I am examining. He argues that in the novel "A crucial tension develops between the external and the internal man, and as a result the subjectivity of the individual becomes an object of experimentation and representation" (Dialogic 37). One of the points of inquiry which runs through my approach to these examples of Victorian poetry is the question of what happens when Bakhtin's "generic" man, the subject of social discourse, becomes specified as a woman, whose subjectivity in turn becomes "an object of experimentation and representation." Not only did the public debate of the Woman Question make women as a group the focus of much social discourse, but the increasing emphasis on equality-oriented feminism in the Woman

Question also created for Victorian feminists a need to assert themselves as subjects within the terms of the dominant culture.

In arguing that these, and many other texts, are centrally occupied with the matter of the Woman Question, I am arguing not for "contextualization" of this poetry but for a reorientation of the way Victorian poetry tends to be read. My project is similar in this respect to that of critics such as Richard Terdiman, who argues: "In any text, what we term the "context"--nominally a liminal reality at the edge of consciousness--inhabits and decenters the text itself. . . . the frame comes unexpectedly to determine the center" (17). In addition, although I argue for direct influence from text to text in only a few instances, one of the subtexts of this study is an intertextual reading, in the largest sense, of Victorian poetry's immersion in Victorian debate over gender.[2]

My basic approach to this material is feminist. I consider gender a factor in any act of reading or writing, and indeed produced in relation to such acts. This study therefore conducts an interrogation of textual practices as a means of approaching the processes whereby gender is inscribed in literature and society. Like Naomi Schor's in Breaking the Chain, my focus is on the relationship between the category of "woman" and the practices of representation, rather than on "representations of women," although I acknowledge, indeed assume, the interrelatedness of the two areas if inquiry, particularly in a period obsessed with the representation of women (x).

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[2] Julia Kristeva explicitly dissociates intertextuality from "the banal sense of 'study of sources'" to emphasize a notion of the signifying practice which recalls Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia: "If one grants that every signifying practice is a field of transpositions of various signifying systems (an intertextuality), one then understands that its "place" of enunciation and its denoted "object" are never single, complete, and identical to themselves, but always plural, shattered, capable of being tabulated" (Revolution 60).

Implicit in the feminist framework of this study is the assumption that literary discourse is not a free, open system, but is constrained by generic and other ideologically-freighted conventions. My study does not take on Victorian poetics: that is, what authors strove to do or thought they were or should be doing. I do not argue, as for example Raymond Colander does of the verse-novel, that the texts here are the result of an intention to take up contemporary issues and debates in formal terms, but simply that they inevitably do so. Instead of discussing conscious inversions of gender and subversions of genre and thus treating particular authors as more or less innovative or enlightened in their deployment of the raw material of their artistry, I treat genre as a social artifact which, along with other factors, constricts the writer and constructs the text.

Rather than assuming that texts have a unified origin in the mind or intentions of an author, I focus as much as possible on the social aspects of textuality, on the possibilities and impossibilities contingent on the system of representation, and on the literary practice within which individual authors wrote. This is not, however, to deprive authors of self-awareness or agency within the constraints of cultural systems; my approach is similar to that of Marlon B. Ross's revision of the place of women in relation to the Romantic movement: "Although I appeal to individual psyches in this study, I take these psyches more as the individualized manifestations of historical processes than as the fully conscious agents of ideological patterning and historical change" (10). While I do not argue that the gender of the author determines the type of ideological work a text performs or the generic strategies it employs, the gendered author is pertinent to this study in other ways. In Chapter Two, for example, I consider what forces might have encouraged women to address the Woman Question in the form of closet drama, and I consider the gender of the author in relation to point of view in Chapter Four, where the first person doubles the voice of poet and internal speaker.

Although my interest is in materialist analysis, I do not subscribe to a base-superstructure model in which the history, ideology, or mode of production dictates the form, content, or meaning of a literary discourse which is somehow of a different order. In the words of Michel Foucault: "discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but is the thing for which and by which there is struggle; discourse is the power which is to be seized" ("Order of Discourse" 110). That is, rather than passively reflecting social conditions, literature actively participates in them. This study argues for an interactive model of literary production according to which texts perform what has been termed by feminist critics such as Jane Tompkins and Mary Poovey "cultural" or "ideological work"; in other words, texts have material effects. Further, I argue within this model for a notion of change and agency by particular subjects within the historical/literary nexus. Chapter One explores more fully the theoretical issues sketched here, and (en)genders a theory of genre as a working model for understanding the relationship between literary and social change. By analogy with Lacan's description of the constitution of the subject in language, I propose a notion of "literary subjectivity" as one of the primary functions of genre.

Chapter Two introduces the Bildungsroman and the heterosexual romance as inscribing differently gendered forms of literary subjectivity, and explores the implications of the clashes between these forms staged by three narrative poems which span a twenty-year period. Mary Anne Brown's Ignatia, 1838, presents an attempt, thwarted by the constraints of romance, to endow its female protagonist with Romantic subjectivity . The Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich, published by Arthur Hugh Clough in 1848, is the Bildungsroman of Philip Hewson, which problematizes the subsidiary position of his fiancée Elspie within the text's narrative economy. Elizabeth Barrett Browning's epic Aurora Leigh, 1856, rewrites the sexual and textual politics of the Bildungsroman plot so as to inscribe the eponymous protagonist as a Romantic subject and subvert the conservative implications of romance. I argue throughout that such interrogations of narrative form represent significant contributions to an ongoing debate over the ontological status of women which crystallized in the late 1850s in the critique of married women's property law.

The following chapter deals with a literary form largely excluded from Victorian literary history: published, rather than produced, verse drama on contemporary topics. I consider what factors might have prompted the choice of drama as a form, what in this case led it into the "closet," and why this body of material has been overlooked. Chapter Three also considers three examples of such drama from the late 1860s and their deployment of dramatic rather than narrative form to inscribe female protagonists who speak and act within the constraints imposed by society. George Eliot's "Armgart," in particular, critiques the type of Romantic subjectivity celebrated in Aurora Leigh, while Augusta Webster's A Woman Sold and Menella Bute Smedley's "Lady Grace" explore the impediments to female autonomy and inscribe a fluidity of identity which counters essentializing constructions of women.

Chapter Four extends this consideration of dramatic form. Dramatic monologues published in 1870 by Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Augusta Webster are linked to the appropriation of the discourse of social science in general and economics in particular by women opposed to the regulation of prostitution through the Contagious Diseases Acts. The poems participate in a broad shift in the discourses of sexuality that permitted repealers effectively to contest the Acts, and the formal strategy of Webster's "A Castaway" enacts the basic repeal strategy of identification with the "fallen woman." I conclude that the inscription of Eulalie as the poem's speaking subject is connected to the assertion of a political voice and subjectivity by British women in the campaign against the Acts. Considering political structures as social forms of representation which reflect the self-inscription and regulatory principles of a society, this chapter traces an analogy between changing literary forms and socio-political forms such as the male franchise, which came under assault in the course of the Woman Question.

The final chapter draws out the implications of my findings as they apply to the criticism of Victorian poetry and the study of genre. In arguing for a general reorientation of Victorian poetry studies, I demonstrate that Robert Browning's formally experimental and solidly canonical The Ring and the Book is as thoroughly imbricated with the Woman Question as the less canonical texts I consider. A rereading of Pompilia's monologue in terms of the formal and thematic conclusions of my study challenges both traditional and feminist assumptions about the text. My model of literary subjectivity as crucially implicated in the interweaving of generic and literary change suggests a revision of Victorian literary history which I elucidate through a consideration of Julia

Kristeva's theory of a revolution in poetic language. Chapter Five concludes that literary subjectivity occupies a pivotal position in the complex interrelations of gender, genre, and social and literary histories.

One might ask why my focus is genre rather than another textual manifestation of the Woman Question. Robert Langbaum wrote convincingly in his study of the dramatic monologue that

> Form is a better index of a tradition than subject matter in that subject matter is often controversial; it is often an index of what people think they believe, whereas form is an index of what is believed too implicitly to be discussed. (36).

Genre is one of the most powerful structuring and hermeneutic devices in the system of representations which comprises ideology; an understanding of genre is therefore absolutely crucial to producing social change. Terry Threadgold argues:

> Not to try to understand those processes, to fall back on the humanistic and Romantic discourses of individualism and creativity, is effectively to maintain the status quo, to refuse to provide access for those who need it to those processes by which ideologies are constructed and maintained. Those processes are the discursive capital of the community, . . . (123)

A further question might be why, since my interest as a feminist is in possibilities for change in the present and the future, I focus on the past. According to Julia Kristeva, "Our century is still living on the nineteenth century's momentum."[3] "We 'Other Victorians,'" to adopt Foucault's epithet, are still working through many of the nineteenth-century's dilemmas (History of Sexuality 1). Not the least of these dilemmas is the beginning of the modern feminist movement in what was termed "The Woman Question"; many of the same questions and issues persist, although frequently located in terms of different vocabularies and points of reference. I hope, however, that in the course of this exploration of problematic, transgressive, and innovative moments in the literary representation of gender, certain points of continuity between the nineteenth century and our own will emerge more clearly than they have previously. In particular, this study traces in nineteenth-century texts what is now posed as a pressing question in feminist theory, literature, and criticism: what is a feminist subject; how is she to be represented; how can she represent herself; what changes do her existence and representation entail in a system of representation that is founded on her absence and silence?

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[3] La Révolution du langage poétique 618; qtd. and trans. Richard Terdiman 43.

CHAPTER ONE: (En)Gendering Genre

Genre, Ideology, and Social Change

"Gender" and "genre" are words which go together. The phrase is euphonious and the etymological links between the two components--which share a Latin root and are still the same in French--are highly suggestive. Yet, despite the frequency with which these words occur in conjunction in literary criticism and theory, the character of that link is not self-evident, nor has it been as "extensively explored" as a recent critic suggests (Hodge 46).[1] This chapter will first consider theories of genre, and then gender and genre, in order to arrive at a working model of the relation between the two.

"The limits of genres," asserts John Enck in the 1965 edition of the Princeton Dictionary of Poetry and Poetics, "upon whose conventions most creativity and surely all criticism in the arts depend, keep shifting from one generation to the next" (199). Enck places "criticism" in a rather precarious, parasitical relation to generic categories. Yet that precariousness now seems enviable, for, Enck implies, one need only discover which boundaries hold in which generation to get on with one's critical job. The present critic's relation to genre, a class of classes which is increasingly at issue, seems far more ambiguous. Indeed, the question of what comprises "form" or "genre" in writing is as vexed as that of how "form" or "genre" functions.

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[1] Hodge makes this contention in the "Sources and Contexts" appendix to his chapter "Genre and Domain": "The relation between gender and genre has been extensively explored. For useful recent discussions, see Batsleer et al 1985 and A. Kuhn 'Women's Genres', 1984. Woolf's A Room of One's Own, 1929, influentially drew feminists' attention to the issues of gender and domain."

An older, formalist, notion of genre such as that employed by Enck considers generic categories to refer to sets of shared characteristics which reside inherently and objectively in the text; "for such a theory," Jonathan Culler argues, "genres are simply taxonomic classes" with no relation to the extra-literary world (123). However, it does not always seem either easy or desirable to isolate formal elements from the other aspects of a text. As H.R. Jauss asserts, "a literary genre exists for itself alone as little as does an individual work of art" (105). Thus, approaches to genre which focus on description and classification have to a large extent given way to a broader inquiry into the interrelationship between genre and other literary and extra-literary issues. The Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin seeks to understand genre "not in its formalistic sense, but as a zone and a field of valorized perception, as a mode for representing the world" (Dialogic 28).

My understanding of genre in this study is very much as a mode of representation, and as the word "mode" suggests, I am finally interested in what genre does rather than what it is. I am interested in the structures which help to construct a text's world view, to order its disparate elements into meaning. Thus the genres I will be considering include the Bildungsroman, the pastoral, the romance or marriage plot, dramatic form, and conventional narrative structures such as the Victorian story of the "fallen" woman. Such structuring devices function as historically and culturally specific sets of codes according to which the "meaning" of a text is constituted, and are indeed crucial to its constitution. Such structures are as necessary for texts to be intelligible as grammatical principles are for the intelligibility of language.

As shared sets of codes or conventions, genres may be understood as cultural agreements or, in Ralph Cohen's words, as "historical assumptions constructed by authors, audiences and critics in order to serve communicative and aesthetic purposes. . . . The purposes they serve are social and aesthetic" (95). Cohen's use of the verb "construct" suggests that genres are somehow freely-chosen entities; however, such social codes are neither individually nor mutually selected and accepted by authors, audiences and critics. They can be positively conscripting and coercive, as Jacques Derrida's essay "The Law of Genre" emphasizes. An author, or for that matter a reader, cannot simply decide to ignore generic pressures and responses. While a reader may read "against" the genre of a work, she cannot simply decide to interpret the generic features that others read as "romance" as "epic," or to construe those features as a new genre altogether.

The notion of "contract" comes closer to representing the constraints which genre imposes. Thus in Fredric Jameson's analysis, "Genres are essentially literary institutions, or social contracts between a writer and a specific public, whose function is to specify the proper use of a particular cultural artifact" (106). As the conjunction with "institutions" indicates, this understanding of genre emphasizes the constraints implied by the word "contract." This model recognizes, for example, that an author's deployment of a particular genre--one might consider an attempt to write a feminist romance--may have unforeseen and undesirable consequences. Genres are social contracts both in the sense that they are social products rather than natural phenomena and insofar as an individual may not simply choose to "opt out" of their operation, any more than she can independently decide to change the meanings of the language she employs. Genres are thus neither, as E.D. Hirsch would argue, "intrinsic" to the constitution of texts, nor, as Adena Rosmarin contends, "extrinsic," that is, strictly hermeneutic tools, "pragmatic rather than natural, . . . whose conceptual shape is precisely determined by that [critical] need" (25).[2] Rather, they are part of the process of writing and reading, an inseparable part of how meaning is culturally and historically produced.

To assert that genres are forms of culturally specific constraints on what may be written or read implies that they are ideological and denies them the status of purely "aesthetic" categories. Susan S. Lanser asserts that the production and dissemination of texts are ideological acts:

> [T]he relationship of the writer to the act of producing and transmitting the literary work . . . . is essentially ideological as well as aesthetic, for the act of writing, indeed the act of using language, is defined, constrained and conventionalized according to a system of values, norms, and perceptions of the world. (Narrative Act 64)

Her remarks recall Bakhtin's notion of genre as a "valorized mode of perception," and underscore the role of a text in perpetuating one particular mode of perception over another. The question of in what particular ways a text performs ideological work needs some further elaboration, however, than an assertion that the text is conventionalized "according to" ideology ("a system of values, norms, and perceptions"), which leaves one to speculate whether genre is ideology (a mode of perception), a reflection of ideology, or a product of ideology, and indeed, what exactly ideology is and how it functions. Lanser's recognition of texts in general and literary forms in particular as ideological cannot be reduced to the notion that texts simply "express" on the level of content certain political ideas and positions. As Cohen asserts--and here he parts company with Jameson[3]--a text's ideology "cannot be deduced from the genre" (94).

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[2] Rosmarin claims in a footnote reference to Jameson, to be taking, "in effect," as her beginning premise, his "final axiom" that at the "final moment of the generic operation, in which the working categories of genre are themselves historically deconstructed and abandoned" "all generic categories" are to be understood as "ad hoc, experimental constructs, devised for a specific textual occasion" (Rosmarin 174; Jameson 145). Her claim seems based on a particularly willful misreading of Jameson, since her contribution to genre theory is entirely idealist and ahistorical.

The most useful articulations of the relationship between ideology and texts have developed from Louis Althusser's theory of ideology as a representation of "the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence," and his theory of culture, including literature, as one of the "Ideological State Apparatuses" which function to reproduce "the relations of production" in a capitalist state (87, 78). The definitive function of ideology as representation, according to Althusser, is of "'constituting' concrete individuals as subjects" (93). "Interpellation," as this function is called, constructs individuals as subjects by "hailing" them as such and thus producing the subject's recognition of herself as the one addressed. From this understanding of ideology as a material practice emerges the notion, as expressed by Mary Poovey, that texts perform "work," part of which is "the reproduction of ideology; texts give the values and structures of values that constitute ideology body--that is, they embody them for and in the subjects who read." Her elaboration of reading as part of a "public institution" recalls Jameson's notion of genre as institution and social contract, and suggests that one of the crucial ideological functions of genre is the constitution or interpellation of the reading subject (Uneven Developments 17).

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[3] Jameson contends that "in its emergent, strong form a genre is essentially a socio-symbolic message, or in other terms, that form is immanently and intrinsically an ideology in its own right. When such forms are reappropriated and refashioned in quite different social and cultural contexts, this message persists and must be functionally reckoned into the new form" (140-41). I read genre as somewhat less mechanistic and more malleable than Jameson would seem to permit.

If genre is intrinsic to a literary practice which, in the words of Julia Kristeva, is "inseparable" from the political horizon (Revolution 105), what is the significance of generic transformation and how does it occur? Generic change, in more traditional literary approaches, is often examined in terms of "internal, mediated, or literary causes" (Fowler, Kinds of Literature 277). This type of analysis, however, offers little to those interested in the ideological force and function of genre and its connection to historical change. Jameson, who has provided the most sustained and systematic account of the relation of textual to social change, articulates his position in terms of a triad made up of the "manifest text," "deep structure" or genre, and "history." He describes the relationship between these three terms as a "permutational scheme" within which the "systematic modification or commutation of any single term" generates determinate variations in the other two (146).

Although Jameson locates history in this relationship as the "absent cause" and refers to "the constitutive relationship of forms and texts to their historical preconditions," he distinguishes his position from "the mechanical Marxist notion of a determination of superstructure by base (where 'determination' is read as simple causality)" (146, 148). Rather, he construes the relationship of the historical situation to the text as "a limiting situation" according to which "the historical moment is here understood to block off or shut down a certain number of formal possibilities available before, and to open up determinate new ones"; his model is thus not strictly speaking deterministic in that it posits not mechanistic causes but "objective, a priori conditions of possibility" (148). Yet it retains a similarity to the base-superstructure model in the sense that change, or the conditions of possibility for change, within the triad is apparently uni-directional and always emanates from historical conditions. In this respect, Jameson's model seems to place texts outside material conditions, rendering them largely reflective of, or at least responsive to, historical change rather than participants in it. This final incubation of the textual from the changing material order makes it difficult to understand how he can designate literary forms "original and meaningful protopolitical acts" (149).

A more useful model, to return to Poovey, would insist on the "interdependent and mutually constructive relation" of material conditions and textual production, since "the kind of linear narrative that many literary critics and historians employ necessarily obscures the critical complexity of social relations" (Uneven Developments 17, 18). Such an approach to "literary texts as agents as well as effects of cultural change, as participating in cultural conversation rather than merely re-presenting the conclusion reached in that conversation," argues Carolyn Porter, would free recent historical, and some "new historical," approaches to texts from their tendency to project "static 'world pictures' and 'world views' and then find confirmation of those constructions in their analysis of textual ideologies (782). Such an approach is essential to address intersecting orders of change, but although it has been articulated at the level of general discursive analysis, there is not an account of the function of genre which will support this necessary insistence on the interconstitutive relationship of generic and social change.

Of course, my interest in the nexus of generic and social change is more specifically a concern with the shifting constructions of gender in Victorian Britain. One obvious implication of an understanding of genre as ideological is that it must also participate in one of the most basic forms of ideological work in western culture: the construction and maintenance of categories of gender. Yet even ideologically informed theories such as Jameson's exclude gender from theoretical discussion of genre. Derrida is in fact one of the few theorists of genre to point out the obvious, foundational connections between questions of genre and categories of gender:

> The question of the literary genre is not a formal one: it covers the motif of the law in general, of generation in the natural and symbolic senses, of birth in the natural and symbolic senses, of the generation difference, sexual difference between the feminine and masculine genre/gender, of the hymen between the two, of an identity and difference between the feminine and masculine. (221).

Though ignored by genre theorists, the nexus of gender and genre has been of considerable interest to feminists seeking to unravel the complex interrelation of sexuality and textuality. I thus turn to the contributions feminist critics have made to the study of genre.

(En)Gendering Genre Theory

The gendered nature of genre has made the formal requirements and conventions of writing of particular concern to feminist critics. Virginia Woolf, for example, remarked in a review of Dorothy Richardson's Pilgrimage that this innovative work exhibited "a genuine conviction of the discrepancy between what she has to say and the form provided by tradition for her to say it in" (Women 188). Vita Sackville-West, in discussing the women poets of the eighteen-seventies praises Emily Dickinson for being one of those who "say what they want to say rather than that which poetry wants them to say," but laments of most women poets that "in the glue and treacle of literary convention they had remained embedded" (133). Rita Felski, in a recent study, makes the related suggestion that literary conventions preclude any notion of "writing in any simple and unmediated way; obviously, formal determinants of textual meaning such as genre possess a relatively autonomous status" (Beyond 48).

Feminist criticism has dealt admirably with the question of gender and genre in its broad outlines. Critics such as Ellen Moers, Elaine Showalter, and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have mapped the ways in which women are excluded and discouraged from writing in literary genres because of the pervasive masculinism of literary culture. Moers sees women creating a female literary tradition because the gates of classical education, the traditional route to authorship, were closed to them. Showalter, too, discovers ample evidence in the line of writers she traces, of the discomfort women writers have experienced, and of their efforts to alleviate it through such strategies as adopting male pseudonyms. Gilbert and Gubar continue the important task of explaining why women writers have begun to come into their own only relatively recently; the first section of The Madwoman in the Attic explores the way that the material forces which encourage male and dismay female writers are buttressed by the conceptual architecture of a culture whose high literary art, in its figuration of writing as a definitively male act, relies on the silencing and even the death of "Woman."

As well as focussing on the way that all high literary genres have been gendered male, this stream of feminist criticism also recognizes that there exists a gender hierarchy among literary genres. This is implicit in the fact that Showalter's A Literature of Their Own discusses a great tradition of women writers in the novel, and that most though not all of the "great writers" of Moers' subtitle are novelists. Gilbert and Gubar take up the issue more explicitly in their argument that women have been even more rigorously excluded from poetic traditions than from novelistic ones. This aspect of their argument may be debatable on some minor points: for example, not all poetic genres have excluded women; the "lady poetess" tradition of the later eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries was strong and influential, though it has been excluded until very recently from literary history.[4] However, most critics would agree that the novel is more closely associated with both women writers and women readers than many other traditional literary genres.[5]

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[4] For an example of an attempt to write the presence and effects of writers such as Felicia Hemans back into the history of the Romantic period, see Marlon B. Ross. Celeste Schenck also challenges Gilbert and Gubar's assertion that "verse genres have been even more thoroughly male than fictional ones" with reference to the modernist period which consigned poetic forms to "genteel poetesses" and formal innovation to men (226).

[5] Traditional critical categories have marginalized genres in which women predominated or excelled--diaries, letters, travel writing, autobiography--as "sub-" or "extra-literary."

Just as Cohen stresses that the ideological orientation of a text cannot be deduced from its genre, so the gendering of genres is not fixed or stable. For example, different feminist critics consider different genres paradigmatically masculine: Susan Stanford Friedman, Marjorie Stone, and Cora Kaplan, among others, regard the epic as the paradigmatic male genre, whereas Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar consider the lyric, as self-expression, the most difficult genre for women writers, and Michelene Wandor regards drama as a masculine literary form because of its public exhibition of ambition. Autobiography presents a case in point of the gendered multivalences of a genre: though a form in which women wrote and excelled frequently, it has been canonized as a male literary tradition beginning with Saint Augustine. As Felski argues, the political significance of writing by women

> cannot be theorized in an a priori fashion, by appealing to an inherent relationship between gender and a specific linguistic or literary form, but can be addressed only by relating the diverse forms of women's writing to the cultural and ideological processes shaping the effects and potential limits of literary production at historically specific contexts. (48)

This said, it is necessary to stress that genre and literary conventions in general, as Woolf recognized in her comments on Richardson, tend to reinscribe the same dominant social structures and gender hierarchies which produced them.

To pose the question of what makes generic change possible, some feminist critics have asserted that women, by virtue of their different relation to literary traditions, find it possible to subvert patriarchal generic conventions. Judith Fetterley, in The Resisting Reader, argues that women can read "double," that is both with and against the textual values which dictate our understanding of texts. Gilbert and Gubar argue that women write this way as well, fashioning an encoded or buried text which expresses the anger and self-assertion that cannot be expressed within patriarchal traditions. Yet, apart from a notion of female experience, theoretically untenable because ahistorical and totalizing, these studies provide little basis for an understanding of the structural relationship of gender and genre.

Feminist study has also produced some sustained and more theoretically-oriented analyses of particular genres and their relation to gender, including Sidonie Smith on autobiography, Christine van Boheemen on the novel, Linda Kauffman on epistolary fictions, and Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsh, and Elizabeth Langland's anthology on fictions of female development. In addition, theorists such as Teresa de Lauretis, Mary Jacobus, and Margaret Homans have, in diverse ways, begun to trace the relationship between gender and representation, sexuality and textuality, and women and language. However, despite the existence of both impressive individual studies of particular aspects of the relationship and substantial theory of the interrelation and mutual determination of sexuality and textuality, feminist criticism has not produced a gendered theory of genre or a satisfactory account of generic change.

This overview of genre theory and feminist criticism and theory indicates a significant gap in theoretical accounts of genre and a need for theoretical attention to genre within feminist accounts. Although, from Aristotle's Poetics through Clara Reeve's Progress of Romance to Jameson's Political Unconscious,[6] writings on genre abound with assertions and assumptions about particular genres being gendered through various characteristics, associations, conditions of production or of consumption, there is not a theory of genre which recognizes gender as inextricable from literary processes and effects. My interest is in elaborating a working theory of genre which addresses its ideological and, more specifically, gendered function, which can account for both its resistance to and ability to change, and which understands such transformation in terms of an interconstitutive relation to social change.

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[6] See Laurie Langbauer, Women and Romance: The Consolations of Gender in the English Novel, 35-40, on Jameson's alignment of romance with women, the implicit primacy of the male subject within his theory of genre, and

A model of genre which will combine the diverse characteristics outlined above--namely, its socially constructed, ideological character, its changeability and concurrent resistance to change--and also insist on the intimate interrelationship of gender and genre can be profitably derived by analogy with a Lacanian model of language acquisition and coeval subject formation. In this analogy, genre is to the constitution of what I am calling "literary subjectivity" as language is to the constitution of the subject. Before moving into the implications of this model, I will briefly sketch the most pertinent points of Lacan's theory of subject formation.

According to Lacan, the subject does not exist prior to language, as is exemplified in the term "infant" which derives from the Latin "infans" or "unable to speak." The infant is "ubiquitous," in the sense that it has no sense of itself as distinct from its environment. Later, in the mirror stage, when the child discovers lack and the distinction between self and other, it is still not a social being, and inhabits the imaginary order, rather than the social or symbolic order. The child only becomes a subject at the moment of entry into language, when the mother-

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his reliance "on developmental myths of the subject, myths based on the subjugation and expulsion of women" (38).

child dyad of the imaginary stage gives way to the triangulation of desire through the introduction of the third term, the Father, or Law of the Father, which marks the entrance into the symbolic order. The entry into the symbolic, or order of signification, is the acquisition of language: in it the child finds an "I", a position in language from which to speak. Thus, just as in the Althusserian model of interpellation the subject is always already constituted, the Lacanian subject does not exist prior to language: there is no self outside of language, which constitutes and regulates that subjectivity according to the Law of the Father.

Therefore to assert that genre bears a relation to the constitution of literary subjectivity similar to that of language to the constitution of subjectivity is to suggest that genre, like a type of textual grammar, regulates the constitution of gendered literary subjectivity, which cannot exist prior to it or in its absence, and which "places" the subject within a literary system akin to the way that pronomial positions such as "I" or "me" place the subject within language. By "literary subject" and "literary subjectivity" I do not imply that a literary text actually conjures up "subjects" within itself. However, it invokes, or tries to invoke, subjectivity in the reader; it mimics a subject position or represents a subject position with which the reader is invited to identify, to interpellate herself.

The strength of Lacan's model of subject formation as opposed to Althusser's--although the two have been combined, for example, by Catherine Belsey[7]--in this instance is that a Lacanian model makes gender an inextricable factor in this process. Despite the charges of essentialism that have been levelled at Lacan, his assertion that it is an "immediate given" and "self-evident fact" that psychoanalysis "deals solely with words" assumes that gender is not rooted in biology but in structures of language: "Men and women are signifiers bound to the common usage of language" (Feminine Sexuality 63; Seminar XX, qtd. in Rose 49). Since language is gendered, the process of subject construction in language is also gendered, and subjects are sexually differentiated accordingly by their entrance into language.

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[7] Belsey 56-67. But see also Stephen Heath's excellent 1979 exposition of the contradictions and different political implications of the two theories in "The Turn of the Subject."

According to a Lacanian model, the subject is necessarily gendered by the phallocentric character of language, language as founded on the signification of the phallus. As Elizabeth Grosz emphasizes, the subject in Lacan is first of all a male subject "positioned with reference to the father's name. He is now bound to the law, . . . given a name, and an authorized speaking position;" the male subject "becomes an 'I', and can speak in its own name" (Jacques Lacan 71). The position of a female subject is more complex and ambiguous:

> In one sense, in so far as she speaks and says 'I', she too must take up a place as a subject of the symbolic; yet, in another, in so far as she is positioned as castrated, passive, an object of desire for men rather than a subject who desires, her position within the symbolic must be marginal or tenuous: when she speaks as an 'I' it is never clear that she speaks (of or as) herself. She speaks in a mode of masquerade, in imitation of the masculine, phallic subject. (71-72).

If one of the primary functions of genre is to constitute literary subjectivity, that the subjectivity constructed by "Western" culture is implicitly male confirms arguments that literary genres are overwhelmingly masculine, suggests why women writers and readers have felt excluded by them, and perhaps also indicates how, in the analyses of Fetterley and Gilbert and Gubar, women can take up an oblique position in relation to them.

The ambiguous relation of women to subjectivity in the Lacanian model is linked to the construction of the symbolic order, which comprises discourses, socio-economic structures, and the conditions of everyday lived experience. The symbolic, as I said of language, is phallocentric. The female subject cannot exist as such because she is excluded from the symbolic order "in so far as the phallic function rests on an exception (the 'not') which is assigned to her. Woman is excluded by the nature of words, meaning that the definition poses her as exclusion" (Rose 49). Mary Jacobus, in a telling analysis of genre theory, notes that the exclusion of woman by genre is an elaboration of a system of difference and exchange:

> Hence gender (sexual difference) establishes identity by means of a difference that is finally excised. What we end up with is not difference . . . but the same: man, or man-to-man. Like the Vaudracour and Julia episode [of The Prelude], and like the feminized genre of romance, woman becomes redundant. Her role is to mediate between men, as the role of romance is to mediate between history and the historian's tale, or page. ("The Law of/and Gender" 53)

Lacan asserts that the sign of "woman" is somehow "outside the law, which subsumes her nevertheless, originarily, in a position of signifier, nay, of fetish. In order to be worthy of the power of the sign she has but to remain immobile in its shadow" ("Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'" 45). His language makes this role sound like a choice, but it is not; silence and invisibility is the place that the law, the order of language, affords woman as woman. The law of genre can be equally coercive in relegating women to the shadowy role of signifier and fetish.

In this light, Naomi Schor's analysis of the classic realist novel in France can perhaps be extended in terms of an even more foundational exclusion, or as she would have it, suppression, of women within first-world generic structures of representation:

> What function, if any, is served by the repression of female libido within the economy of the realist text? . . . I am led to conclude that the binding of female energy is one of (if not) the enabling conditions of the forward movement of the "classical text." (Breaking the Chain xi)

Thus, one of the most fruitful products of the intersection of literary theory and psychoanalysis is the model of the "subject" as in part produced by literary structures. For example, Juliet Mitchell asserts that "Literary forms arise as one of the ways in which changing subjects create themselves as subjects within a new social context" (289). Rather than assenting to the causal relation implied here--first social change, then literary change--,however, I would, in keeping with my discussion above of the relationship between genre and social change, emphasize a more reciprocal notion of the relation as expressed by Julia Kristeva:

> The text is a practice that could be compared to political revolution: the one brings about in the subject what the other introduces into society. The history and political experience of the twentieth century have demonstrated that one cannot be transformed without the other. . . . (Revolution 17)[8]

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[8] By "text" Kristeva means a specific signifying practice associated with "poetic" language rather than all written or literary productions. However, I am employing this passage within a broader notion of "text." Chapter Five takes up more specifically the question of what constitute a "text" or a textual revolution.

The Lacanian model posits a relation between the living, or speaking, subject, and literary texts which, while mediated by language and textuality, is not reducible to them. Grosz comments on Kristeva's version of that interrelation:

> The speaking subject is not merely an individual producer of texts, an 'author,' but is symptomatic of a social organization: the ruptures and breaches in the ordered functioning of meaning and coherence mirror, even forecast, ruptures in social unities at the level of the State and ideological institutions. Textual analysis is thus simultaneously political and psychological in its implications. (Sexual Subversions 41)

A text dealing in generic change must tread the fine line between on the one hand adhering sufficiently to cultural codes to remain intelligible while on the other avoiding merely reinscribing those codes and thereby reinforcing the status quo. Richard Terdiman elaborates on this dilemma in the work of Mallarmé:

> Mallarmé's writing places syntax under stress almost to the point of rupture. But the actual suspension of syntax would interrupt intelligibility altogether. Such a text could achieve no socially effective intervention at all. No one would understand it. So in relation to the norm, its violation strives for the greatest possible distance, but without disconnection. (69)

Rita Felski argues a related point in the context of feminist cultural intervention. She challenges the tendency among some feminist theorists to "equate all existing discursive structures with masculine repression" and to assume that there is some way to evade or operate outside of such structures. "[A]ll forms of activity, however radical," Felski contends, "can be realized only in relation to and within systemic constraints."[9] The analogy with genre is clear: if genre is what makes a text readable, no text will function entirely outside of conventions of genre. Thus the attempt to inscribe differently means engagement with cultural texts, or, in Felski's words, a "complex appropriation, revision, and development of existing cultural frameworks" (59).

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[9] Beyond Feminist Aesthetics 59. As Grosz notes, such insights have their roots in Saussure: "because the signifying structure (langue) is collective, it can adapt to change only within broadly recognisable parameters. Neologisms too

One implication of this Lacanian analogy is that the operation of genre, like the operation of language on the subject, brings an unconscious into play. Genre thus not only functions "unconsciously" in the sense that it is "naturalized" by writers and readers so that its structures and ideological ramifications imbue the literary text with "meaning" in the same unreflective [illegible]hion that language governs our perception and experience of the world. Genre is also, like language, susceptible to the operation of the unconscious. In Lacanian analysis, the unconscious, insofar as it is "structured like a language," and because of the perpetual chain of signifiers and potential for slippage between them, introduces a certain mutability and transformability to the signifying system, destabilizing conscious attempts at coherent and unified subject positioning (Ecrits 20). It appears in the language of the subject as "Impediment, failure, split;" it appears in the form of "discontinuity," in which "something other demands to be realized" (25). It is largely this aspect of Lacanian thinking that Jane Gallop celebrates in asserting that "Lacan's major statement of ethical purpose and therapeutic goal . . . is that one must assume one's castration." This castration, of both women and men, is not primarily sexual, but more importantly, linguistic: "we are inevitably bereft of any masterful understanding of language, and can only signify ourselves

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far removed from the existing structure are not accepted by it" (Sexual Subversions 60).

in a symbolic system that we do not command, that, rather, commands us" (Reading Lacan 20).

Furthermore, language is not simply a "system." It is a continuing practice. Language is not static and uncontested; it is constantly embattled, invested at the same and at different times with different significance by different groups for different purposes: in other words, language in use becomes discourse, made up of many diverse and conflicting discourses, and, most importantly of all, subject to history and change. Although a Lacanian analysis of language as a system leads to a rich description of a subject formed "in process," psychoanalysis unfortunately lacks a comparable notion of language. Either ignorant of or, more likely, indifferent to the changeability of language, such thinking implies that insofar as language is a system of difference founded on the phallus as privileged signifier of lack or difference, changes in the position of the subject vis-à-vis other terms of difference within the system, or changes in those terms, do not fundamentally alter the constitution of the subject. In other words, only the (lack of the) phallus matters. However, if language does shift and change within discursive practices, if the phallus is really a signifier of difference rather than a transcendental signifier, even its significance within the system is amenable to change. As Stephen Heath argues, the "influential error of . . . Lacanian psychoanalysis, is an ultimate belief in 'language', which becomes exactly the instance of determination, . . . as the symbolic (with the constant meaning of the phallus, the phallus 'destined' for this role)" (41). It is more than anything, to adopt Saussurean terminology, the emphasis of langue, at the expense of parole, that leads to critiques of Lacanian theory such as that offered by Rita Felski:

> Psychoanalysis . . . while helping to account for the construction of the female subject and current manifestations of sexual difference, cannot offer any kind of theory of social transformation and is unable to account for the possibility of women acting on and changing aspects of the structures which shape them. (Beyond Feminist Aesthetics 58).

Thus, while holding onto the basic Lacanian analogy for genre, one needs to emphasize not only the subject in process suggested therein, but an alternative notion of language--or genre--in process, shaped by the social beings it constitutes in their discursive practices. Judith Butler points out the fallacious assumption "that to be constituted by discourse is to be determined by discourse, where determination forecloses the possibility of agency" (143). Language changes through human agency, which is not to say through a "mastery" of language but through its use in discursively embattled historically specific social practice.

Butler highlights the significance of the multivalency and discursive plurality of language for a theory of the subject:

> If identity is asserted through a process of signification, if identity is always already signified, and yet continues to signify as it circulates within various interlocking discourses, then the question of agency is not to be answered through recourse to an "I" that preexists signification. In other words, the enabling conditions for an assertion of "I" are provided by the structure of signification, the rules that regulate the legitimate and illegitimate invocation of that pronoun, the practices that establish the terms of intelligibility by which that pronoun can circulate. (143)

According to the Lacanian analogy and to my analysis of change in language, the subject of language, then, and with it the literary subject of genre, is not only in process but a process in a dialectical relation with historical change (cf. Heath 40). One of the ways to explore the significance of genres in literary texts is to pay attention to how the text "places" women: what places it makes available for their occupation, whether it inscribes them as subjects or objects, speakers or spoken, self-representing or represented, or a combination thereof. For a shift in the terms of a system of difference can shake the frame of reference, even one based on the signification of the phallus.

As Nancy Miller has argued, Hélène Cixous' contention that "with a few rare exceptions, there has not yet been any writing that inscribes femininity" ("Laugh of the Medusa" 248) is

> both true and untrue. It is true if one is looking for a radical difference in women's writing and locates that difference in an insurgence of the body, in what Julia Kristeva has called the irruption of the semiotic. And it is true again if difference is sought on the level of the sentence. If, however, we situate difference in the insistence of a certain thematic structuration, in the form of content, then it is not true that women's writing has been in no way different from male writing. ("Emphasis Added" 27)

Likewise, generic transformations can gesture towards the inscription of female subjectivity, while not literally embodying it, in a significant fashion; to assert that all textual productions of the Victorian period, or Western literature, are essentially similar in their exclusion of "woman" or female subjects would be to miss a difference which is crucial in both political and literary terms.

CHAPTER TWO:

Novel Forms: Marriage, Romance, and Bildungsroman

Bildung and Romance

Frances Power Cobbe's powerful 1869 essay "The Final Cause of Woman" opens by mocking the on-going debate over what women "are"--that is, over what women should be. Rather than attacking particular views of women, she begins, self-reflexively, much as Virginia Woolf was to do in A Room of One's Own, by satirizing the proliferation of such discourse, the "avalanche of books" on women (Woolf 26). For Cobbe, all the theories about women's nature betray a larger cultural need to theorize women. She uses this observation to contradict such ontological projects and dismantle their truth claims:

> Of all the theories current concerning women, none is more curious than the theory that it is needful to make a theory about them. That a woman is a Domestic, a Social, or a Political creature; that she is a Goddess, or a Doll; the "Angel in the House," or a Drudge, with the suckling of fools and chronicling of small beer for her sole privileges; that she has, at all events, a "Mission," or a "Sphere," or a "Kingdom," of some sort or other, if we could but agree on what it is,--all this is taken for granted. But, as nobody ever yet sat down and constructed analogous hypotheses about the other half of the human race, we are driven to conclude, both that a woman is a more mysterious creature than a man, and also that it is the general impression that she is made of some more plastic material, which can be advantageously manipulated to fit our theory about her nature and office, whenever we have come to a conclusion as to what that nature and office may be. "Let us fix our own Ideal in the first place," seems to be the popular notion, "and then the real Woman in accordance thereto will appear in due course of time. We have nothing to do but make round holes, and women will grow round to fill them; or square holes, and they will become square. Men grow like trees, and the most we can do is to lop or clip them. But women run in moulds, like candles, and we can make them long-threes or short-sixes, whichever we please. (1-2)

Cobbe maintains that all the diverse perspectives on women fall into one of two categories. The first encompasses "Woman in her Physical, her Domestic, and her Social capacity: or Woman as Man's Wife and Mother; Woman as Man's Housewife; and Woman as Man's Companion, Plaything, or Idol," or in other words, woman as a relative creature whose end is to serve others, in particular, men (6-7). The second is "based on the theory that Woman was created for some end proper to herself" (6). Cobbe argues for the latter, concluding that "it is not till man gives up his monstrous claim to be the reason of an immortal creature's existence; and not till woman recognises the full scope of her moral rank and spiritual destiny, that the problem of 'Woman's Mission' can be solved" (26).

Cobbe's essay participates not only in the "Woman Question" in general and the creation of a philosophical basis for Victorian feminism in particular; it also addresses the underlying issues of the Victorian debates over female education in which she, as a proponent of higher education for women, was embroiled. Calls for improved female education in the early nineteenth century ranged from Hannah More's Strictures, which "feared undue enhancement of the female self-image, which she saw as inimical to the selfless, civilising mission of woman within the home and family" (Theobald 25), to the more witty Jane Taylor's "Essay in Rhyme" on "Accomplishment," which concludes:

> Thus Science distorted, and torn into bits,
> Art tortur'd, and frighten'd half out of her wits,
> In portions and patches, some light and some shady,
> Are stitch'd up together, and make a young lady.
> (122)

In its basic outlines the nineteenth-century education debate polarized over the same issues that are at stake in Cobbe's essay: whether women were relative creatures who should be educated to serve those around them, or, like men, independent individuals who should be educated on equal terms for their own ends. Although the controversy became fiercer towards Cobbe's part of the century as women began gaining entrance to higher and professional schooling, the terms of the debate were set as early as 1839, when Sarah Ellis, discussing "Modern Education," deplored what she called the educational "fashion of the day": "the ambition of the times, that all people should, as far as possible, learn all things of which the human intellect takes cognizance" (62-63).

In "The Final Cause of Woman" Cobbe lays bare the way that theoretical constructs of "Woman" both affect and effect the construction of actual gendered subjects, not only through their own force as representations but as elaborated in such social processes as education. Such inscription and formation of gendered subjects occurs not only in theoretical but also in literary discourse. Women are moulded by literary representations as well as theoretical models and cultural practices, and the same ontological question is at stake. Cobbe identifies a moulding of female subjects in the representations of women within theoretical discourse. Similarly, this chapter explores some implications of the different subject positions female characters occupy in relation to and within two forms of literary representation, the romance and the Bildungsroman. Both of these literary forms are concerned with the growth and development of their protagonists, in other words, with modelling subjectivity. As it turns out, the two terms do not so much denote two separate narrative categories as two gendered conceptual categories of literary subjectivity. The assumptions that Cobbe satirizes--that women, unlike men who possess organic integrity like trees, are relative creatures composed of a malleable wax-like substance--underlie, and thus define and limit, understanding of the conceptual category "women". This chapter proposes that such assumptions are also relevant to the distinction drawn between the gendered fictional forms of romance and Bildungsroman. The Bildungsroman, as practiced by the Romantic novelists and their heirs, constructs a literary model of subjectivity as male, transcendental, self-determining. Romance constructs a version of subjectivity for women which is much more subjected to social constraints and external forces; that is, romance involves a muted or even suppressed notion of the transcendental Romantic self.

There is a substantial degree of slippage between definitions and descriptions of the two literary forms. The Bildungsroman often includes romantic elements and episodes, while the romance with a female protagonist usually includes features one would associate with the Bildungsroman.[1] Yet although, clearly, "most fictional expositions of love have to some degree followed the time-honored form of the bildungsroman," it is equally evident that, in the words of Joseph Boone, "a general distinction can be made between the function of the love-plot in male and female stories of maturation" (74). While this distinction is widely applied, it is nonetheless difficult to articulate its grounds. For example, why is it that a narrative in which, as John H. Smith translates Hegel's reductive summary, "the hero goes through his 'apprenticeship' only to get his girl in the end" (209) is understood as a Bildungsroman, while a similar plot with a female protagonist is classified as a romance or simply a novel?[2] The source of "romance" and "Bildungsroman" in "roman" denotes shared features, yet we typically assign different generic labels to nineteenth-century male and female narratives of development and the two categories carry quite different connotations.

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[1] I am using "romance" throughout in the sense not of aristocratic European quest narratives, although these are an important precursor to the later form (cf. Langbauer), but in the sense of a narrative which focuses largely on a female protagonist and concludes with the success (i.e. marriage) or failure (i.e. disappointment, seduction, or death) of romantic heterosexual union. My sense of the romance plot thus approximates Nancy Miller's notion of the "heroine's text," which "is plotted within this ideologically delimited space of an either/or closure" (xi). Moreover, in the words of Joseph Boone, whether or not such narratives conclude with marriage, they "almost uniformly uphold the concept of romantic wedlock as their symbolic center and ideal end" (9). It is also important to distinguish between the adjectives "romantic" and "Romantic", the latter of which I use to refer to the conventional understanding of the beliefs and practices of the male poets of that literary historical period.

Attempts to define the Bildungsroman in terms of "structural generic norms that can be clearly isolated" have not been successful,[3] a failure which suggests that the genre is embedded in social as well as literary norms. The exclusion of texts involving female protagonists suggests that a different significance is accorded to representations of such processes for women. That distinction, which seems arbitrary at the level of narrative structure or event, become intelligible in terms of the gendered social semiotics internalized both in nineteenth-century narrative and twentieth-century literary criticism.

Smith offers a very fruitful shift in the analysis of the Bildungsroman away from the older "notion of Bildung as a vague, organic process of self-development/growth that leads to the individual's integration into society" (215). Instead, he offers a model which combines Hegel's use of the term with a Lacanian model of psychic development. He describes Bildung as "the process whereby an individual experiences self-alienation in the form of different self-form(ul)ations in order to discover that both he and his society are nothing but mutually recognized self-representations" (215). As Smith quickly makes clear, his use of the male pronoun here is not pseudo-generic: "the individual engendered by the process of Bildung is more than a neuter person, since the ... individual is not just developing into a social being by mastering society's language but adopting a male position within the patriarchy" (215). The strength of Smith's approach is that it allows him to examine the generally unstated premise implicit in most studies of a genre almost exclusively exemplified by novels by men with male protagonists:

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[2] Studies of the Bildungsroman focus overwhelmingly on male-authored texts with male protagonists. Buckley's consideration of The Mill on the Floss in Seasons of Youth is less an exception than it seems, as the editors of The Voyage In are quick to note: the chapter both "subsumes Maggie Tulliver's development to that of the symbiotic brother-sister pair" and stresses "her failure to become self-determining" (Abel et al 9). Franco Moretti, however, does depart dramatically from critical tradition in his recent assertion that the twin prototypes of the Bildungsroman are Wilhelm Meister and Pride and Prejudice (229 n.1)

[3] John H. Smith, 208. He is referring to the recent efforts of Martin Swales. Definitions of the Bildungsroman are numerous, disparate, and frequently exceedingly subtle, and lists of qualifying works range from one to many (Smith 207); Randolph Shaffner provides an overview (1-35).

> I would argue that Bildung, and its narrativization in the Bildungsroman is not an "organic" but a social phenomenon that leads to the construction of male identity in our sex-gender system by granting men access to self-representation in the patriarchal Symbolic order. (Smith 216).

Smith concludes that "the strict gender codification at the basis of Bildung, taken in its historical context, makes female Bildung a contradiction in terms" (220). Many recent critics would seem to agree with this assertion, and would argue that the love-plot, which Boone calls "the female bildungsroman, where marriage confers all identity" (75), conflicts with the notion of subjectivity implicit in the masculine genre.

Undoubtedly, the most significant feature of the female romance plot is the teleology of the marriage ending. Karen Chase argues that "Where men get educated and cultivated, women get married; marriage is the female counterpart to bildung: in place of growth there is a wedding" (15). The typical male Bildungsroman, as Boone argues, "often merely uses the love-plot as a kind of narrative scaffolding upon which to hang the various independent concerns . . . of the hero's growth to adulthood and social integration," and the narrative may or may not conclude with his marriage (74). For a woman, however, marriage is the crucial narrative achievement; Boone cites the example of Zenobia in Hawthorne's Blithesdale Romance, who complains that wedlock is the "single event which she must contrive to make the substance of her whole life" (Hawthorne 55). Marriage as the defining factor in the establishment of female selfhood is contradictory, however, as it necessarily entails union with another and the end of independent selfhood. The eighteeenth-century jurist William Blackstone conveys the social meaning of the institution in his explication of the legal principle of coverture:

> By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband: under whose wing, protection, and cover, she performs everything; and is therefore called in our law-french a feme-covert. (I 430)

Thus, as Rachel Blau DuPlessis argues, in contrast to the Bildungsroman, "the romance plot muffles the main female character, represses quest, valorizes heterosexual as opposed to homosexual ties, incorporates individuals within couples as a sign of their personal and narrative success" (5). Marriage is thus both the unquestionable goal of women's lives and incompatible with Bildung. As Kathleen Blake succinctly puts it: "What romantic doctrine makes a means to poetic development in the case of men, social convention makes an alternative in the case of women" ("Romantic Poet as Woman" 395).

The conflict between romance and Bildungsroman runs deep. As DuPlessis argues, it was so fundamental that "In nineteenth-century fiction dealing with women, authors went to a good deal of trouble and even some awkwardness to see to it that Bildung and romance could not coexist and be integrated for the heroine at the resolution" (3). This chapter will examine attempts to negotiate the complex relationship between romance and Bildungsroman in three Victorian poems: Mary Ann Browne's Ignatia (1838), Arthur Hugh Clough's The Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich (1848), and Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Aurora Leigh (1856). They are all lengthy narrative poems: "Ignatia," at about 1500 lines is slightly shorter than The Bothie; Aurora Leigh is by far the longest at 11,000.

Ignatia:

Ignatia was published in 1838 by Mary Ann Browne, later Gray, who was considered by the time of her death five years later one of the foremost women poets of her day (Blain et al 455). Browne takes her epigraph from Shelley:

> With mountain winds, and babbling springs,
>   And moonlight seas, that are the voice
> Of these inexplicable things,
>   Thou didst hold commune, and rejoice
> When they did answer thee; but they
> Cast, like a worthless boon, thy love away.
>
> Oh, wherefore didst thou build thine hope
>   On the false earth's inconstancy?
> Did thine own mind afford no scope
>   Of love or moving thoughts to thee?

That natural scenes, or human smiles,
Could steal the power to wind thee in their wiles.
(Browne 1)[4]

The passage conjures up the dream of complete self-reliance, of life independent of external circumstances, the romantic notion of an essential immovable self or identity, or what Marlon B. Ross has described as "self-possession." Such a choice of epigraph suggests that Ignatia will involve a Romantic narrative of self-development, a poetic approximation of the Bildungsroman. However, the opening of Ignatia is already marked by a certain ambiguity or doubleness, almost a rhetorical duplicity, as the speaker seems to hold commune with the scene she dwells on, "summer and sunshine" at her father's house. But it becomes apparent by the end of the first stanza that she is in fact (self-)exiled from her father's hall and the scene there that she describes, to a "bare islet of the deep" (3). That she refers to her former home as her "father's hall" speaks of her sense of displacement and dispossession for, her father being dead, it is legally hers. But she asserts that, rather than live in a world which nurtured and then blasted her hopes she has chosen to live by the ocean, which she apostrophizes as a more fitting environment:

. . . thee, great Ocean, who art still
In power an emblem of my tameless will,
Whose barren, restless waves, and endless strife,
Bear truer likeness to my wasted life. (4)

Ignatia's identification with the sublimity of the ocean is a Romantic gesture: she thereby conveys a sense of the immense scope of her frustrated ambition.

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[4] Mary Ann Browne, Ignatia, and Other Poems. References within the text are to page numbers. Browne is often listed in catalogues and reference works under her married name of Gray.

Ignatia relates her childhood. As in many Romantic poems, the historical and geographical setting of Ignatia is vague, although there is some suggestion that Ignatia's mother rescued her father from prison during the Crusades. She describes the isolation from society which results from her mother's being Palestinian. Her primary role model is her mother who, she says, educates her not in "formal rules" or sermons but in "LOVE" (7). Rather than an academic education, then, Ignatia receives a feminine education in sensibility appropriate to a sentimental heroine. Her mother's death when Ignatia is twelve, followed by her father's when she is seventeen, leaves Ignatia orphaned, alone, and in possession of her father's estate. Relations attempt to disinherit her by proving her illegitimate, but only succeed in igniting a powerful sense of self:

> Then first I felt my rising spirit swell
> To meet the tempest, and my heart rebel
> Against oppression . . . (11)

Her relations then, much like Aurora's aunt in Aurora Leigh, become proponents of social conventions and proprieties. They urge upon her the necessity of a chaperon, but she insists on living unaccompanied.

Lonely and alone on her father's estate, Ignatia develops a sense of communion with the stars:

> . . . intelligence
> Shot with their rays into my soul; I knelt
> O'erpowered with a solemn joy; then, then, I felt
> Convinced of what I oftentimes had heard,
> That those celestial glories can accord
> Knowledge and power. (13-14)

As an antidote for depression and loneliness, she vows to devote herself to their study. This resolution leads her to the family library, which she had formerly used only with permission and supervision. There she finds

. . . ancient tomes, that taught
How the celestial influences on high
Rule and affect all mortal destiny . . . . (14-15)

She discovers many secret books of "forbidden lore" which she devours: "I could not rest till I had read them all!" (15). Like Faust's pursuit of knowledge, Ignatia's study of the "ancient tomes" and scrolls of "celestial influence" quickly takes on hubristic overtones:

I lived a lonely life, and yet a train
Of menials did I keep; nor could retain
The secret of my studies; with the true
They mixed the marvellous, and the story grew
'Till all who dwelt around were sure I held
Strange power o'er destiny. (15)

Factors such as "the fostering of [her] wild romance" start to convince her that she does indeed have power to divine the future (15).

Yet Ignatia cannot sustain this life of intense study, and becomes "overworn in heart and brain" (20):

This could not last;
The thirsting and the fountain came too fast
On my excited spirit. (16)

The fountain imagery, reminiscent of Coleridge's "deep romantic chasm," indicates that it is not simply the physical demands of studying that have worn Ignatia down. Rather, she is betrayed by an inability to cope with her overwhelming desire and emergent sense of selfhood. Her collapse, though physical, carries overtones of psychological breakdown:

My mind was darkened and my nerves unstrung,
And my faint frame with strange sick pangs was wrung. (16)

Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall describe a breakdown by an early Victorian woman, Emily Shore, the daughter of a clergyman whose "guilty love of poetry" and strenuous reading program, which had no external aim or sanction, were followed by "a breakdown which she interpreted as having 'overtaxed my strength with study.'" Once she recovers, "she turned to learning housekeeping which she had previously despised but which now made her feel useful" (291). Ignatia's case seems similar. Her studies not only involve defiance of social proprieties and conventional adages about female weakness but also direct disobedience of her father, whose "secret tomes" she was forbidden to read during his lifetime. Her narrative reveals that she too turns from her studies to more socially acceptable female pastimes after her illness.

Ignatia's illness consists of fevered dreams which convey a sense of vulnerability and powerlessness. She longs in one of her visions to plunge into the ocean, but feels an invisible and inexplicable constraint:

> My limbs were held with unseen bonds--the reel
> Of the bright waters maddened me--in vain
> I strove and struggled with my viewless chain . . . . (18)

She dreams herself in a forest dell in which the peace is suddenly broken by the emergence from "All the dark clefts, and rifts, and secret places" of a "fearful tribe," "A myriad of fantastic faces," which mock and "jeer and jibe" (18).[5]

She awakes weak and lonely to realize with dismay that the only care she has had was grudgingly provided by servants. However, her strong sense of self remains intact and she is revived by "Sweet Nature" (20). At this point a major narrative shift occurs in the poem. The theme of solitary self-education or Bildung, in the form of Ignatia's pursuit of (masculine) knowledge, collapses with the vanishing of her "heart's high strength" (2). She is left unable to return to her studies.

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[5] The landscape imagery here suggests once again the "romantic chasm," but the sexual horror of the passage anticipates the glen and taunting goblins of Christina Rossetti's Goblin Market (1862).

What ensues is a romance of sorts, when Ignatia finds a dyadic, narcissistic relationship in which her identity and desires are reflected back at her:

> I found a fit companion, one who kept
> Still near me if I waked or if I slept,--
> One, like me, from the common herd withdrawn,--
> A little motherless and lonely fawn.
> If I, by some rare chance, laughed, sang, or smiled,
> The creature gladdened like a fondled child . . . . (21)

The fawn is a perfect mirror to Ignatia, an externalization of her self-image, which, if somewhat chastened by her illness, nonetheless still involves a strongly individualistic, even elitist, sense of herself as "withdrawn" from the "common herd." In this enclosed relationship Ignatia finds contentment.

Abruptly, this idyllic relationship ends when her fawn is killed. Ignatia looks up and beholds the hunter, Leon, the man she will marry:

> I raised my throbbing head,
> And I beheld a form; oh, even yet
> Do I not gaze upon it, as it met
> Mine eyes for the first time? a joyful dread
> Seems mingled with the memory of that hour,
> When first I saw my destiny, whose power
> O'er me began at that moment . . . . (23)

His "graceful form and face" are beyond description, but, she says:

> It is enough to say
> I felt, within my bosom's inmost core,
> That thrill of sympathy, unknown before,
> Chasing the sense of loneliness away;
> He who had slain my fawn unwittingly,
> Grew in one moment all the world to me. (24)

She finds that although she had earlier despaired at the thought that her fawn might die, she now feels her "love and fancied sympathies" for the creature have passed away like a "morning vision" (25). By sunset, she looks to Leon rather than the stars as controller of her destiny. The next day the two meet to bury the fawn and in their converse she finds "strange sympathies" (27). They meet daily and before long "His spirit had the mastery of mine own" (28) and his image and spirit infuse the natural world. He seems strangely ambivalent about her, but nonetheless finally proposes and she finds herself "calm and quiet in the excess / Of that o'ermastering, perfect happiness" (31). This was the true end of her existence, she believes:

> Love, love! I feel that all my spirit's strife
> Hath been to reach its fountain . . . . (34)

Thus the Romantic fountain of knowledge, imagination, and self-attainment is transformed into a fountain of romantic love.

Ignatia's love for Leon is tinged with fear, and she who was so proudly independent of others' wishes becomes obsessed and enslaved by his standards and ideals:

> I loved him, though I feared him; yet most dear
> Unto my heart was even that loving fear;
> . . .
> I dreaded to do aught he disallowed,
>   Aught that might link me, in his memory,
> With folly or with ignorance; my heart
>   Was ever watching all offence to shun,
> His impress to each action to impart,
>   To do all things as he would have them done;
> And I was ever trembling when he came,
>   Yet sadly weary when he was not near;
> At mine own voice my cheek hath glowed with shame,
>   How my unpolished accents on his ear
> Must grate! (35)

She is convinced he possesses absolute knowledge and places her confidence in his ability to guide and educate her:

Day after day I felt my mind expand
  Beneath his influence; from its depths he drew
  All that was beautiful, and pure, and true;
He seemed to have all knowledge at command,
  And poured it freely on my wondering sense;
  He was as a supreme intelligence . . . . (35-36)

The "simple lays" that she writes at this time describe how his image is interposed in her every activity, including reading:

I tried to read, but oh, thy name,
  Its form the lines and letters took!
I strove in vain, thine image came
  Gliding betwixt me and the book . . . . (36)

However, Ignatia juxtaposes this evocation of her love-blinded state with her later, more experienced, perspective:

Yes, thus I loved him, with that perfect love
  Unmixed with worldly motive, thought, or fear,
Which now I know can only dwell and move
  In woman's bosom. Wherefore doth she rear
Idols for worship? Wherefore doth she lean
  Her trusting heart upon a broken reed?
  Why on such phantasies her spirit feed? (37-38)

This is the first in a series of increasingly sharp denigrations of men and romance. At the same time that Ignatia evokes soul-obliterating romantic love, she undercuts the state that she describes. The mere presence of the later self to reflect on her earlier involvement cannot but ironically undo any sense of romantic love as the fulfillment, and therefore the final end, of self.

Ignatia and Leon marry but although she feels that her privilege in being his wife should be completely satisfying, she wavers between feeling fettered and feeling guilty:

What could I want? I knew not, yet 't was strange,
Amidst this happiness I longed for change--
The onward movement of the heart; I know
This restlessness hath wrought me bitter woe;

I felt a sad, an aching tenderness--
A dim, far dread lest he should love me less;
How had I longed to feel no earthly power
Could part us--that whatever cloud might lower
We had one fate, one future; that a chain
Had bound us, never to be loosed again!
How bright the prospect looked--no cloud, no shade--
I entered, and myself a shadow made! (39)

The final image combines a recognition of her self-immolation within marriage--she is a shadow or shade, the ghost of her former self--with her sense of having perversely marred a perfect union. The union seems increasingly imperfect as she realizes that Leon's love for her is waning, that he has begun to weary of their unworldly life and no longer finds a world in her. He no longer snatches and crushes underfoot the flower she kisses. Such a practice, moreover, represents in itself a dubious sign of love in a relationship which has been ambiguous from the moment he killed her fawn. Leon does not even say he loves her but, rather, "be thou mine own!" (30). She worries that he loves her only for her beauty, which she regards as "but the shell / Of the high mind that did within it dwell-- / The mind whose gifts I worshipped" (44). This is part of a larger feeling of being at a disadvantage in the marriage:

If that I spake, and something else engaged
 His thoughts, I felt a deep and thrilling pang
 That still, all lover-like, he did not hang
On every word I uttered. I was caged,
And could not leave him,--so we had exchanged
 Our places now, my sovereignty was over . . . . (40)

The mention of sovereignty presents an interesting clue as to why romances typically close with the protagonist's marriage. In addition to the fact that her future and identity are now understood to be settled, romances prolong and dwell on the period of female sovereignty as long as possible. As Rosalind Coward argues, the courtship represents "a brief moment where significant events may happen, after which her choices and identity are lost for ever" (Female Desires 176). Ignatia is unusual in writing beyond the traditional marriage ending to show the failure of the romantic expectations. As Boone has argued, "following the course of wedlock beyond its expected close and into the uncertain textual realm of marital stalemate and impasse" is a common strategy for attacking the love-plot tradition from within (19).[6]

Ignatia gradually realizes that her dream of sharing all in her mind and heart with Leon was idle, and that the rich and "secret chambers" of her mind must remain unshared (43). With this insight comes the accompanying realization of how far he is from what she believed him to be, and how far she can outstrip him intellectually:

> And this was he whom I had thought akin
> To a Supreme Intelligence; within
> Whose heart I dreamed still unknown treasures lay,
> Continually to waken, day by day;--
> My fancy drew a picture, and then gazed
>   On its rich colouring, until I believed
> It was instinct with life; and all amazed
>   At its strange beauty, I was self-deceived.
> There was perspective in the scene I drew--
> Depth, breadth, and space, as well as gorgeous hue;
> I touched it--'t was a picture, flat and cold,
> And all unreal. Thus did I behold
> The mind I deemed exhaustless; there was nought
> Of feeling, passion, phantasy, or thought
> But what I could surpass:--I who had quailed
> In awe before him; I whose cheek had paled
> When thought of mine, of pathos, or of wit,
> I to his judgement ventured to submit.

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[6] The other strategy, which works from without, Boone argues, "has been to invent fictional trajectories for the single protagonist, male or female, whose successful existence outside the convention calls into question the viability of marital roles and arrangements" (19). As I will argue later in this chapter, Aurora Leigh attacks the tradition from within and without simultaneously.

> Love's light still lingered round my spirit's throne,
> But there that spirit sate enshrined alone!
> (44-45)

This passage is an interesting comment on romantic attachment as misdirected Romanticism. If we recall the epigraph from Shelley, it suggests that Ignatia's failure is the result of her attaching the Romantic powers of her mind, imagination, and affection to a human object.

Leon leaves to visit his sister (even though Ignatia is pregnant), and though she has noticed a restlessness in him, she hopes he will return with renewed ardour. Ignatia finds renewed joy and purpose in motherhood, but her child dies the day after she finally realizes that Leon no longer loves her. She resolves to go and seek him in the city. She arrives as his sister is being married, and sees among the crowd a beautiful blond, light-skinned woman named Isabel, whose eyes were "at times as timid, startled, wild, / As are a half-tamed fawn's" and who sings like a lark, stream, and dying swan. Ignatia discovers that the beautiful woman's admirer is none other than Leon (54). Isabel's fairness briefly revives the question of race, since Ignatia is dark; the contrast implies that Ignatia is excluded by her birth from female, that is romantic, happiness because of her otherness.[7]

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[7] The dark-haired Ignatia's defeat by a fair-haired woman can be related to Maggie Tulliver's aversion, in The Mill on the Floss, to finishing Corinne: "'I didn't finish the book,' said Maggie. 'As soon as I came to the blond-haired young lady reading in the park, I shut it up and determined to read no further. I foresaw that that light-complexioned girl would win away all the love from Corinne and make her miserable. I'm determined to read no more books where the blond-haired women carry away all the happiness'" (332). As Nancy Miller notes, "Maggie's literary instincts were correct. True to the laws of genre" Corinne, like Maggie within Eliot's novel, is robbed of happiness by a fair-haired foil ("Emphasis" 40). The resemblance between the doomed protagonists extends beyond hair colour, however, for in suggesting de Stael's Corinne (1807) as an influence on Browne's poem, it further marks Ignatia's narrative as that of

Ignatia goes outside and views the stars which had once been her object of study:

> I raised mine eyes unto the radiant spheres
> That burned afar; how saddened, crushed, and quelled
> Was my young spirit, since I first beheld
> With my soul's inner eye those glorious stars . . . . (56).

She overhears Leon trying to convince Isabel to leave the country with him. Ignatia places herself between them:

> With a rapid movement suddenly before
> The startled twain I stood; with tongue, that clove
> To my parched mouth, for utterance I strove
> Vainly, and sank upon the earth; a sleep,
> A death-like torpor, dreamless, as 't was deep,
> Crept over all my senses. (57)

A month later she comes to her senses, having been nursed by his sister after Leon handed her over and left for distant lands. Ignatia returns home but feels haunted and goes to the lonely island which is described at the opening of her narrative. Her former interest in the heavens resurfaces briefly, but as a pastime while she waits for death, rather than an end in itself:

> Here the quiet sky
> Shines out at midnight, decked all gloriously;
> And here once more the holy stars rebind
> Their chain of power around her lonely mind
> Who left her love for them, in hopes to dwell
> With happiness;--'t was unattainable,
> And all she found was mockery. Once more
> I can with eager eye those orbs explore,
> Because I know it will not now be long
> Before their mighty and immortal song
> Shall gush upon my soul. (60)

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a woman of intelligence and talent doomed by the patriarchal conventions of literature and society.

Her concluding stanza is bathetic in the extreme. She hopes that long after her death, Leon will come to reflect that "'midst the world, with all its tinsel shine, / He never found a heart that loved like mine!" (61).

As a poem, Ignatia is easy, indeed a pleasure, to read: it is well-written with some remarkably evocative passages. As a narrative, Ignatia is more difficult, even baffling. What is most striking about the poem is its narrative confusion, verging on generic schizophrenia. Ignatia never resolves its generic affiliation. The conventional story of forsaken, martyred love vies with a narrative of Bildung. Ignatia's romance and marriage compete with her awakening sense of self, her attempt at self-education, and her various reflections on the structural inequalities and injustices of marriage, on problems surrounding the role of women and heterosexual romance in general, and on the moral, spiritual, and intellectual superiority of women to men.

A quick enumeration of the poem's major narrative shifts illustrates its awkwardnesses. The beginning suggests that the story may be a conventional one of love or female happiness doomed due to racial difference, as in Caroline Norton's poem "The Creole Girl or, the Physician's Story." This theme is upstaged by disillusionment with human ties (her grasping relatives) and the obsessive pursuit of (forbidden) knowledge. The illness may be a punishment for her quest for knowledge, which is succeeded by the relationship with the fawn. The fawn is a narcissistic reflection of her desires: it responds in the way she likes and, in another sense, plays female to her male.[8] This feminocentric dyadic relationship is casually murdered by a male intrusion, which goes unexplained, as if it is natural and somehow inevitable. Ignatia accepts Leon's legal and moral trespass without question; he does not apologize. Masculinity, as this entrance portends, is ambivalent in this poem and carries an undercurrent of treachery or deceit. The heterosexual romance proves inadequate, and is followed by a brief excursion into the joy of motherhood as a solution to Ignatia's disappointment, but the child, like the fawn, dies. Despite the final betrayal by Leon, however, the poem closes with a very conventional, pious sentiment confirming the importance of romantic love and a desire for Leon despite all the indications of his worthlessness. The notion that his love or recognition of her worth might redeem or comfort her is particularly inappropriate to the extent that Ignatia herself has reached the conclusion that she is far more intelligent and faithful than he. The difficulty here is not that the sudden and apparently inexplicable shifts in the plot make Ignatia at times read more like myth or allegory than realistic narrative, but that the different narrative conventions and assumptions clash.

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[8] Ignatia controls the fawn's destiny; she plucks it from the "common herd" as her father did her mother; she is in a position of power and action whereas it is responsive and reactive; she speaks and it responds.

Ignatia is firstly a Romantic poem, which is one reason why specific narrative details are often omitted; they are not essential and, in fact, the myth-like quality conferred on the poem by their omission is an asset. However, this is a Romantic poem with a difference, largely the difference of gender, and it is for this reason that the more realistic, even novelistic, specifics of plot and situation intrude. For although the poem in one respect attempts to construct a narrative of the development of a Romantic figure of genius, that figure is a woman. The narratives of women's lives are more encumbered with detail, more demanding, at least socio-historically, of a novelistic account. For in early nineteenth-century terms it would be nonsensical to describe a teenaged woman who takes up intense study of forbidden (that is masculine, in fact, her dead father's) knowledge without detailing how such an act is accomplished in practical terms.[9] This is the strongest reason for the death of Ignatia's parents. Hence also the sustained treatment of the attempts to make her lead a life of propriety, gentility, and femininity. Ignatia manages to accomplish the significant achievement of getting its protagonist on the road to self-discovery, only to fail through the pitfalls of competing generic claims.

The Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich:

The political dimensions of Arthur Hugh Clough's The Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich[10] were recognized by its Oxford readers in 1848: Clough wrote to Ralph Waldo Emerson that they regarded it as "'indecent and profane, immoral and (!) communistic'" (10 Feb. 1849; Correspondence I 240). More recently, Patrick Scott has called the poem "the only major English poetic response to the hopes and frustrations of European radicalism in 1848" ("Clough" 98). The poem's sexual politics have lately claimed greater attention, to the extent that one critic has asserted that they outweigh the social politics. The Bothie, according to John Goode,

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[9] One can compare here the similar novelistic attention to detail in Aurora Leigh as regards not just what Aurora reads but how she gets her hands on such material; in her case too the lure is her dead father's hidden books, but the prohibition comes not from him but from her aunt.

[10] Parenthetical references within the text are to book and line number, and refer to Norrington's Oxford Standard Authors edition of Clough.

> is not a poem about revolution, but a revolutionary poem about love, the personal emotion which existing society most directly challenges, and which, through its insistence on human continuity against social divisiveness, most immediately brings the individual consciousness into conflict with society. The poem celebrates the possibility of love, and defines its relationship to the contemporary social structure. Precisely because it is such an affirmative poem about love, and love cannot merely be seen as relief or escape from the social structure, it necessarily becomes a radical critique of society and a vision of the possibilities of historical change. (64)

However, as the slippage between categories in his own statement reveals, the distinction that Goode attempts to draw between love and politics is rather difficult to maintain. This difficulty is especially pronounced in the case of The Bothie, since the political moment and movements--the 1840s, Chartism, and socialism--within which the poem is situated are ones in which social and sexual politics were radically interwoven.

Chartism contributed, both by its principles and by the active participation of working-class women, to the growing feminist political movements in the nineteenth century.[11] Likewise, European and Owenite socialism involved critiques of marriage, unequal education, and the sexual division of labour.[12] The fact that the political formulations of The Bothie's protagonist, Philip, take the form of diatribes on the nature and proper role of women is thus no accident. As Shirley Chew notes, "Philip's interest in the position of women, in particular the working woman, demonstrates the close connection between feminism and the new social doctrines of the 1830s and 1840s" (20). When Clough went to Paris to experience the revolution first-hand, he was a sympathetic frequenter of the feminist coffee-houses that were springing up as part of the revolutionary movements.[13]

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[11] Chartist Reginald John Richardson, for example, in The Rights of Women, (1840) asserted the right of women to vote, although the assumption of coverture leads him to limit this to spinsters and widows (see Thompson 125). Jane Rendall notes the uncertainty among historians about the direct legacy of the female Chartist movement (238-43). Thompson, however, in her conclusion to "The Women" in The Chartists, notes the strong association in the minds of middle class (especially female) reformers between Chartism and the question of female suffrage (120-151); certainly Harriet Taylor Mill in 1851 saw them as essentially connected. She asserts: ""The Chartist who denies the suffrage to women, is a Chartist only because he is not a lord" (96-97).

[12] See, for example, Malmgreen: "In the process of mapping a 'new moral world', in which the economic basis of society would be transformed and the satisfaction of mankind's essential physical and psychological needs assured, some Utopian socialists recognized and considered the problem of woman's social subordination" (3), although she also argues that "[d]espite their reputations as fore-runners of modern feminism, the best known Utopian

At the same time that The Bothie is clearly a political poem which takes on sexual as well as social politics, it has also been read by both Clough's contemporaries and his later critics as a Romantic fiction of development. Walter Houghton, for example, places The Bothie firmly in the tradition of Wilhelm Meister, as well as noting Clough's admiration for Byron, Goethe, and Carlyle (93, 95).[14] In this perspective, the role of women in The Bothie seems less radical, for, as Smith argues, the self-formulations of the Bildungsroman frequently take the form of different forms of women. Philip's articulation of his identity as a radical by means of his attitudes towards women fits into this

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theorists--Henri de Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier, and Robert Owen--devoted relatively little attention to the specific needs and aspirations of women or to the origin and nature of female oppression. ... There was, however, some discussion of all facets of the Woman Question--including women's suffrage--in Utopian circles (4). See also Barbara Taylor's excellent study Eve and the New Jerusalem.

[13] See, for example, his May 31, 1848 comments on Mme Niboyer and the Club des Femmes in Paris (Correspondence I 213).

[14] Clough's friend, John Shairp, a master at Rugby, in a letter criticizing Amours de Voyage as "the most Wertherish (not that I ever read Werther) of all you have yet done," implies that The Bothie was redeemed only by a "fresh element" in the writing, characters and setting (J.C. Shairp to Clough, November 1849; Correspondence I 275).

paradigm, and he also, like many Romantic protagonists, moves through a series of emblematic female figures in his narrative of self-discovery. Margaret Fuller in Woman in the Nineteenth Century notes the teleology of gender underlying the plot of Wilhelm Meister:

> As Wilhelm advances into the upward path, he becomes acquainted with better forms of Woman, by knowing how to seek, and how to prize them when found. . . . [W]ith Wilhelm, the gradation is natural and expresses ascent in the scale of being. (127)

What is noteworthy about The Bothie is the way the poem calls attention to this aspect of its narrative structure. By yoking Philip's attitudes towards women with his excursions in political thought, the poem denaturalizes the plot of Philip's education. The narrative device of a series of relationships with different female representatives of the social classes, which parallels that of his Oxford reading-party classmates through books, seems just as contrived and self-consciously reasoned out as any formal reading program. Furthermore, both educational programs are subject to the supervision of the tutor.

The initial description of Philip Hewson attaches him to a lengthy list of causes:

> Hewson a radical hot, hating lords and scorning ladies,
> Silent mostly, but often reviling in fire and fury
> Feudal tenures, mercantile lords, competition and bishops,
> Liveries, armorial bearings, amongst other matters the Game-laws.
> (I.125-28)

The breadth of the issues, the trivializing "amongst other matters," and the apparent lack of a sense of relative priorities or connections between them, suggests both the bemused attitude of his classmates to his radical convictions, and the immaturity of the twenty-year-old who espouses them. Philip's only detailed explications of his political views, however, focus not on the issues listed above but on the nature and proper role of women. He first approaches the subject in response to his classmates' discussion of their previous evening's dancing partners:

> Turned to them Hewson, the chartist, the poet, the eloquent
>   speaker.
> Sick of the very names of your Lady Augustas and Floras
> Am I, as ever I was of the dreary botanical titles
> Of the exotic plants, their antitypes, in the hot-house.
> Roses, violets, lilies for me! the out-of-door beauties;
> Meadow and woodland sweets, forget-me-nots and heartsease!
>   Pausing awhile, he proceeded anon, for none made answer.
> Oh, if our high-born girls knew only the grace, the attraction,
> Labour, and labour alone, can add to the beauty of women . . . .
>   (II.18-26)

Philip recounts to his friends the intermingled births of his social beliefs and his consciousness of sexual desire, "the feelings between men and women" (II.39). Philip's "confusion of sexual instincts with championship of shared labour" as Patricia Ball puts it (174), is generated by the sight of a woman digging potatoes:

> One day sauntering 'long and listless,' as Tennyson has it
> Long and listless strolling, ungainly in hobbadiboyhood,
> Chanced it my eye fell aside on a capless, bonnetless maiden,
> Bending with three-pronged fork in a garden uprooting potatoes.
> Was it the air? who can say? or herself, or the charm of the labour?
> But a new thing was in me; and longing delicious possessed me,
> Longing to take her and lift her, and put her away from her
>   slaving.
> Was it embracing or aiding was most in my mind? hard question!
>
>   (II.41-48)

As Chew observes, Philip's supposedly radical attitude towards women is betrayed by the traditional textual sources he employs to elucidate it:

> When Philip tries to advocate a relationship between the sexes based on shared labour, his conventional attitudes are further betrayed by his inability to conceive of the relationship except in terms of female dependence and subordination--Eve created to be helpmeet for Adam and 'from his own flesh taken'; Pygmalion and Galatea; the medieval lady who, through her knight's devotion, shall 'grand on her pedestal rise as urn-bearing statue of Hellas.' Critical of the over-dressed 'doll' of polite society, he dresses a 'doll' of his own, substituting for satin, gros-de-naples and sandals the plainer articles of worsted, linsey-woolsey and clogs. Unable to make human contact, he reverts to the aesthetic figures of patriarchal imagination. (20-21)

A related critique is found in a classmate's response; Hobbes actually tells Philip that he "speaks like a book" (II.142).

Philip's elaboration of his views on women occurs immediately before the students depart for a three-week break in their reading holiday. When the allotted time is over, Philip fails to return for more reading, and their tutor learns that the idealist has apparently put his theory into practice with "golden-haired Katie, the youngest and comeliest daughter" of a farmer at Rannoch (III.195). Hobbes, picking up one of Philip's earlier Biblical allusions, suggests that this result was the inevitable consequence of his eroticization of work and working-class women:[15]

> How could he help but love her? nor lacked there perhaps the
> attraction
> That, in a blue cotton print tucked up over striped linsey-woolsey,
> Barefoot, barelegged, he beheld her, with arms bare up to the
> elbows,
> Bending with fork in her hand in a garden uprooting potatoes?
> Is not Katie as Rachel, and is not Philip a Jacob?
> (III.231-35)

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[15] Eroticization of women of the working classes was common with middle-class Victorian men. See Leonore Davidoff's discussion of Arthur Munby's relationship with Hannah Culwick in "Class and Gender in Victorian England" and Cora Kaplan, "Pandora's Box."

When another student arrives and informs them that Philip has left Rannoch, they momentarily conjecture that he has gone off with Katie "in delight at the fun, and the joy of eventful living" (III.248).

The Bothie's fourth book opens with an apostrophe to Clough's mock-epic muse, "Swifter than steamer or railway or magical missive electric," to help the poet seek his "wandering hero" (IV.4,7). Philip is discovered wandering the mountains alone, lamenting: "Would I were dead . . . that so I could go and uphold her" (IV.43). His distress derives in part from a perceived conflict between his idealistic view of his relationship with Katie--"we mated our spirits" (IV.58) and his view of any physical expression of it as shameful and revolting. His mind conjures up the "visions of horror and vileness" consequent, at least for Katie, on physical consummation; he wishes himself dead because he imagines the potential of spirits for "Entering unseen [the bodies of the living], and retiring unquestioned," so that they leave "No cruel shame, no prostration" (IV.65,41,45).

Philip's mood shift seems quite inexplicable, particularly since the narrative momentarily glances toward the farm at Rannoch and finds Katie "smiling and blushing as ever" as she dances with another of the Oxford students (IV.99). Philip explains his distress in a letter to his tutor as the result of a quick, penetrating glance by a girl. She looks vaguely familiar to him but, he writes, "that wasn't it; not its import":

> No, it had seemed to regard me with simple superior insight,
> Quietly saying to itself--Yes, there he is still in his fancy,
> Letting drop from him at random as things not worth his
> considering
> All the benefits gathered and put in his hands by fortune,
> Loosing a hold which others, contented and unambitious,
> Trying down here to keep-up, know the value of better than he
> does.

Was it this? Was it perhaps?--Yes, there he is still in his fancy,
Doesn't yet see we have here just the things he is used-to
elsewhere;
People here too are people, and not as fairy-land creatures;
He is in a trance, and possessed; I wonder how long to continue;
It is a shame and a pity--and no good likely to follow.--
Something like this, but indeed I cannot attempt to define it.
Only, three hours thence I was off and away in the moorland,
Hiding myself from myself if I could . . . . (IV.134-47)

The "girl" is Elspie, whom Philip will come to love and marry by the end of the poem. Her look violently disrupts the narrative and sends Philip off in another direction. It destroys his complacency and his self-serving, colonizing views of the Scots as "fairy-land creatures." It brings him to reality and responsibility and he finds himself guiltily dreaming of fallen women:

Still in my dreams I am pacing the streets of the dissolute city,
Where dressy girls slithering by upon the pavement give sign for
accosting,
Paint on their beautiless cheeks, and hunger and shame in their
bosoms;
Hunger by drink, and by that which they shudder yet burn for,
appeasing,--
Hiding their shame--ah God!--in the glare of the public gas-lights?
Why, while I feel my ears catching through slumber the run of the
streamlet,
Still am I pacing the pavement, and seeing the sign for accosting,
Still am I passing those figures, nor daring to look in their faces?
Why, when the chill, ere the light, of the daybreak uneasily wakes
me,
Find I a cry in my heart crying up to the heaven of heavens,
No, Great Unjust Judge! she is purity; I am the lost one.
(IV.155-165)

Philip dreams of prostitutes, in whose existence, according to conventional Victorian thinking, his dalliance with Katie has implicated him. Although he does not actually seduce Katie, he nonetheless feels implicated by his privilege and access to lower-class women. Ball acutely argues that part of his guilt is due to the fact that he realizes he "confused a holiday attraction with a passion based on high principles, and to that extent he was a greater danger to Katie than any of his friends could be" (176).

Philip's fear for Katie is also, as Ball stresses, "a melodramatic indulgence" which does not represent, although it hints at, "more realistic and responsible relations with women" (175). But Philip, as he tells his tutor, has no illusions about Katie in particular having been ruined by him; rather, he seems to have a much more vivid apprehension of male sexual irresponsibility towards women in general. His horror is that in acting out his idealized sexual politics he might have been exactly that which he abhors, an upper-class man casually ruining the prospects of a lower-class woman:

> You will not think that I soberly look for such things for sweet
>   Katie;
> No, but the vision is on me; I now first see how it happens,
> Feel how tender and soft is the heart of a girl; how passive
> Fain would it be, how helpless, and helplessness leads to
>   destruction.
> Maiden reserve torn from off it, grows never again to reclothe it,
> Modesty broken-through once to immodesty flies for protection.
> Oh, who saws through the trunk, though he leave the tree up in the
>   forest,
> When the next wind casts it down,--is his not the hand that smote
>   it? (IV.166-73)

Adam reminds him in his response that class difference as well as sexual difference is at stake: "To the prestige of the richer the lowly are prone to be yielding" (IV.219). Perhaps in revulsion at this reminder of the power his class has given him, Philip flees to the castle at Balloch where he busies himself dancing with Lady Maria. His admiration for her causes him to question his former convictions, and pronounce, unsure whether he is ironic or earnest: "O ye rich! be sublime in great houses" and back up his pronouncement with biblical authority (V.70). Before long, however, the tutor receives a letter asking him to hasten to the Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich, where Philip has found "she whose glance at Rannoch / Turned me in that mysterious way" (VI.49-50), and where his former principles, albeit somewhat moderated, have returned to him. The Bothie is the final stage in Philip's development within the poem, and his relationship with Elspie represents the culmination of his education.

As his education draws to a close, one wonders how much Philip's views of women have been modified by his experiences, particularly the traumatic aftermath of his time with Katie. For example, does he persist in his belief that women are essentially passive, the objects of theory and male manipulation? Certainly Elspie's glance, and later her speech, have the corrective effect of making him passive, confused, and reactive rather than active, knowing, and controlling. Elspie also informs him that Katie "is strong and not silly; she thinks no further about you" (VII.17). Philip portrays Elspie as his compass and guide in his confused journey: "I have carried your glance with me undimmed, unaltered, / As a lost boat the compass some passing ship has lent her" (VII.41-42). This simile is ambivalent, however: it connotes both Elspie's stasis in relation to Philip's activity and her control in relation to his passivity.

When Philip declares--in a very roundabout fashion--his love for her, Elspie responds in an extended simile which raises the question of her role in his narrative of Bildung:[16]

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[16] Readers then and since have found Elspie's language too sophisticated for such a character, though no such criticism has been levelled at the language her father employs (see, for example, J.A. Froude's letter to Clough, Correspondence I 235). The response to Marian Erle's language in Aurora Leigh has been almost identical, with Cora Kaplan chiming in with nineteenth-century reviewers to complain that Marian's language is too educated. What is at stake in both responses is that the representation of lower-class women as intelligent and articulate is perceived as "unrealistic" because it does not accord with perceptions of how such a doubly-debased subjectivity should be represented.

> . . . it feels to me strangely
> Like to the high new bridge, they used to build at, below there,
> Over the burn and glen on the road. You won't understand me.
> But I keep saying in my mind--this long time slowly with trouble
> I have been building myself, up, up, and toilfully raising,
> Just like as if the bridge were to do it itself without masons,
> Painfully getting myself upraised one stone on another,
> All one side I mean; and now I see on the other
> Just such another fabric upraising, better and stronger,
> Close to me, coming to join me: and then I sometimes fancy,--
> Sometimes I find myself dreaming at nights about arches and
> bridges,--
> Sometimes I dream of a great invisible hand coming down, and
> Dropping the great key-stone in the middle: there in my dreaming,
> There I feel the great key-stone coming in, and through it
> Feel the other part--all the other stones of the archway,
> Joined into mine with a strange happy sense of completeness.
> (VII.57-72)

There is a genuine poignancy in her description of trying to build herself up alone and unaided, "without masons," only to be confronted with an other "better and stronger." The passage suggests the difficulty of Bildung for a woman who has neither the physical freedom nor the material and educational resources of a gentleman. Philip does not respond to this aspect of the speech, but rather seizes the romantic opportunity it offers, taking her hand when she pauses in her knitting, crying with emotion over it, kissing it, dropping at her feet and burying his head in her apron. She bids him be patient but he presses her to accept him, saying "Do as I bid you, my child," telling her to stop calling him "mister," and kissing her on the lips when she does (VII.92).

The next day Elspie avoids him, and in the evening, "almost peevishly," reproaches him for his hastiness and dominance (VII.99). His kiss of the previous evening "shocked and terrified" her, and, she tells him, prompted a

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Few living people speak in blank verse such as Barrett Browning's, much less Clough's tricky hexameters, yet such speech accords with conventional expectations of the representation of educated, middle-class characters.

different dream than that of the bridge (VII.117). "Smiling almost fiercely," she rebukes him:

> You are too strong, you see, Mr. Philip! just like the sea there,
> Which will come, through the straits and all between the
> mountains,
> Forcing its great strong tide into every nook and inlet,
> Getting far in, up the quiet stream of sweet inland water,
> Sucking it up, and stopping it, turning it, driving it backward,
> Quite preventing its own quiet running: and then, soon after,
> Back it goes off, leaving weeds on the shore, and wrack and
> uncleanness:
> And the poor burn in the glen tries again its peaceful running,
> But it is brackish and tainted, and all its banks in disorder.
> That was what I dreamt all last night. I was the burnie . . . .
> (VII.119-129)

Elspie's graphic description of the foul, tainted tide water forcing its way "tyrannous" into the sweet inland water of the burn reveals that Philip's sexually predatory potential is clear to Elspie (VII.130). This passage illustrates the differing implications of marriage for male and female subjectivities. As Robindra Biswas argues, the image "re-creates perfectly the physical and breathless terror of imminent subjection and soilure and experience, the fear and the fascination, the overwhelming compulsion, the despair of identity".(280). As Elspie contemplates "union" with Philip, she fears that his identity, represented as salt water, will overcome hers, imaged as clear water:

> I was confined and squeezed in the coils of the great salt tide, that
> Would mix-in itself with me, and change me; I felt myself
> changing;
> And I struggled, and screamed, I believe, in my dream. It was
> dreadful. (VII.131-33)

Philip's response to Elspie's speech recalls the intense effect of her glance at him earlier in the poem. He recoils, falls back, shivers, and pales: this effects a role reversal in which she is active and he is passive. She is then able to agree to marry him and to imagine sexual consummation in reciprocal, positive terms, as "sweet multitudinous vague emotions" (VII.168). Once Philip is no longer forcing himself upon her, she no longer imagines the tide forcing itself up into the burnie, but rather on the ebb:

> That great power withdrawn, receding here and passive,
> Felt she in myriad springs, her sources, far in the mountains,
> Stirring, collecting, rising, upheaving, forth-outflowing,
> . . .
> With a blind forefeeling descending ever, and seeking,
> With a delicious forefeeling, the great still sea before it;
> There deep into it, far, to carry, and lose in its bosom,
> Waters that still from their sources exhaustless are fain to be
> added. (VII.157-165)

It is worth noting that what changes is for the most part Elspie's attitude towards what will happen, not what will happen itself. Yet the change wrought in Philip is positive. He is less demanding and compelling, more comforting and nurturing, the syntax of the poem's language reflecting his new gentleness and hesitation: "Philip, raising himself, gently, for the first time, round her / Passing his arms, close, close, enfolded her, close to his bosom" (VII.170-71).

Chew argues that "It is a sign of Clough's boldness as a writer that the basis for a relationship between the lovers should be sought first in an understanding of sexuality as power" (21). She is referring to Elspie's lecture on Philip's flirtation with Katie, but the observation obviously extends to their exchange surrounding Philip's proposal. It is a sign also of The Bothie's honesty that Elspie's resolution of her fears does not obscure the essential inequity of heterosexual marriage conveyed by her metaphor. Salt water and fresh water always combine (assuming either equal amounts or, as in Elspie's figure, more salt water) to make more salt water.[17] Although Elspie's second description of

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[17] Aurora Leigh makes a similar analogy when she writes that in romantic love women dissolve like pearls into men's wine:

> . . . where we yearn to lose ourselves

the burnie suggests that her change of heart stems from a determination that her "sources" will remain pure and inexhaustible, it remains undisputable that Philip's identity and ambitions will determine the character of their marriage. The conclusion of the poem supports this assumption.

Following her acceptance of Philip, Elspie's doubts about the nature of their union shift to the class difference between them. Although she, and the poem, dwell most on her lower status--he "too high, too perfect, and she so unfit, so unworthy"--there is nonetheless the same sense of her reluctance to give up herself:

> . . . she also was something,
> Not much indeed, it was true, yet not to be lightly extinguished.
> Should _he_--_he_, she said, have a wife beneath him? herself be
> An inferior there, where only equality can be? (VIII.20-23)

There is a curious ambiguity in the use of "lightly" as an adverb: is she to be extinguished at any rate, but only after weighty consideration? Then too, there is the troubling matter of the couple's unresolved dispute over education and reading. It begins with her objection to his looking "Scornful and strong," which makes her think of the dangers of wild waters again, "a wide and rushing river," and refusing to be carried over it (VIII.99, 100). Despite her insistence that she will not be a burden to him, he insists romantically that she shall be: "O sweet burden . . . light as a feather" (VIII.106). She interrupts his lovemaking to announce: "But I will read your books, though, / Said she, you'll leave me some,

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> And melt like white pearls in another's wine,
> He seeks to double himself by what he loves,
> And make his drink more costly by our pearls.
> (Barrett Browning, _Aurora Leigh_ V.1078-81)

Parenthetical references to _Aurora Leigh_ are given in the form of book and line numbers and refer to the Porter and Clarke edition, volumes 4 and 5.

Philip" (VIII.111-12). He refuses to leave her any, on the grounds that he wants her to be his relief from books, be the Nature to his Culture, object to his subject: "Weary and sick of our books, we [men] come to repose in your eye-light, / As to the woodland and water, the freshness and beauty of nature" (VIII.117-18). She meets his sexism with a threat to end the relationship, at which Philip backs down, but only grudgingly:

> What, she said, and if I have let you become my sweetheart,
> I am to read no books! but you may go your ways then,
> And I will read, she said, with my father at home as I used to.
> If you must have it, he said, I myself will read them to you.
> Well, she said, but no, I will read to myself, when I choose it.
> (VIII.120-24)

Philip's position is little different from Romney's in *Aurora Leigh* or the Graf's in "Armgart": all three suitors desire female auxiliaries to their selves.

We see no more of the lovers interacting, however, as the narrative draws back for the final book of *The Bothie*. Philip returns to Oxford to study and, in a letter to his tutor, describes his feeling of battling in darkness, and of the return to his soul, like the ocean, of "swelling and spreading, the old democratic fervour" (IX.81). In an extended mock-epic simile, he describes the effect of Elspie's love on him as like that of dawn on the city:

> So that the whole great wicked artificial civilised fabric--
> All its unfinished houses, lots for sale, and railway outworks--
> Seems reaccepted, resumed to Primal Nature and Beauty:--
> --Such--in me, and to me, and on me the love of Elspie.
> (IX.105-108)

By the conclusion, Philip has passed his exams and "won his bride" (IV.138). They sail for New Zealand, with wedding gifts, which are catalogued in epic fashion, and include a Bible, bedstead, and letter from Hobbes to Philip. The letter opens with reference to a Chartist song, implying that Philip's marriage and emigration represent the fulfillment of his political ambitions. Hobbes' letter also contains the benediction: "Go, be the wife in thy house both Rachel and Leah unto thee!" and expresses hope that Philip will, as "An unroasted Grandsire, / See thy children's children, and Democracy upon New Zealand!" (IX.157,161-62). Hobbes in a postcript goes on to expand upon his "allegory" in yet more Biblical language, language which is continued in the poem's final lines:

> They are married, and gone to New Zealand.
>
> . . .
>
> There he hewed, and dug; subdued the earth and his spirit;
> There he built him a home; there Elspie bare him his children,
> David and Bella; perhaps ere this too an Elspie or Adam;
> There hath he farmstead and land, and fields of corn and flax fields;
> And the Antipodes too have a Bothie of Tober-na-vuolich.
> (IX.193-200)

Hobbe's analogy pays tribute to the significance and the millenial possibilities of Philip and Elspie's cross-class marriage. As Goode argues, in Hobbe's version of the myth, "Rachel and Leah are one--the old conflict between romantic love and marriage is resolved" (68). This resolves an exclusively male marital dilemma, however, and brings to mind the rather more serious female conflict between marriage and identity. Hobbes' biblical source and language add a distinctly patriarchal resonance to this ostensibly revolutionary resolution.[18] Although, as Goode asserts, "Love and democracy are aspects of each other because they are visions of the unity of life beyond the false dichotomies of a class structured society" (68), the "love" which resolves The Bothie can only overcome class difference insofar as it upholds sexual difference. As we shall see, Aurora Leigh takes up precisely this notion that differences in social rank can be resolved while sexual hierarchies are retained.

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[18] A later poem by Clough also indicates that the resolution was far from final for the poet at least. "Jacob's Wives" (1849), rather than depicting the three as united, as at the end of The Bothie, is instead comprised of alternating stanzas in which the two wives voice their competing claims to their husband.

Biswas explains the ending of The Bothie in terms of "the Victorian intellectual's need to find in women an embodiment of that potent simplicity of elemental nature which dissolves all contradiction and heals all difference" (279).[19] Given the ambiguous notes sounded in the ending, however, it is just as plausibly an ironic resolution, a self-consciously facile ending which, if read carefully, contains the seeds of its own critique.[20] As such the ending calls into question what Rachel DuPlessis has called the "plot of courtship as social and gender reconciliation" which, in her view begins to break by the latter half of the nineteenth century" (15). As Goode argues, The Bothie's conclusion undercuts the sexual/social revolution in two ways. First, the successful resolution of the desire for revolution and a new social order remains implicit, utopian, unrealized at the political level; second, "their marriage is necessarily conditional on escaping from the society they transcend" (69). The resolution can only occur in New Zealand, so its potential for ameliorating problems in Britain is doubtful. The final line of the poem also marks the new social structure as remarkably like the old, for their home is called the Bothie of Tober-na-vuolich.

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[19] See also Houghton 106, to whom Biswas appears indebted.

[20] Biswas gestures in this direction in a footnote: "The recollection of Clough's relationship with his sister and his efforts to help her in her bid for independence, and the fact of his forward-looking interest in the 'woman question', should make us hesitate at least in identifying this [Philip's] mode of apprehending woman's capacities as his own" (n.1 279).

It is significant that the The Bothie, a poem which switches genres with mercurial speed and frequency, concludes in a predominantly pastoral mode. Rod Edmond argues persuasively for the conservative ideological implications of the pastoral closure:

> At the end of The Bothie, the pastoral attempts to excise the social, cancelling rather than resolving the tensions and suppressing or redefining 'the old democratic fervour' which would otherwise disturb the calm surface of the poem's conclusion. (83)

Edmond's reading of the close of the poem suggests that a formerly dialogic mingling of genres, in which no single discourse holds for long, is replaced by the more monologic pastoral mode:

> As pastoral becomes dominant there is no longer any place in the poem for those energies released by its other modes. These are neutralized or dissipated and the poem's tensions are relaxed. Pastoral blurs and softens the picture as an exploratory narrative employing different modes, ends in the closure of a single one. (83)

Likewise, the pastoral conclusion suppresses the contradictions in the relationship between Philip and Elspie; in Philip's evocation of her love as dawn on the city, she bears little relation to the woman portrayed earlier. The narrative of The Bothie explored the politics of gender, but these questions are given over at the conclusion to the apparent stability of gender relations implied in the pastoral mode. It is significant that by this point Elspie no longer speaks, no longer represents herself within the poem.

Clough's jocular, satiric, mock-epic form preserves the conventions and structure of the romantic epic of self-development, while drawing attention to its devices and implicitly bringing their effects into question. The Bothie is a male Bildungsroman which draws attention to and reveals the suppression of the female Other as the cost of the subject-position of its protagonist. Clough, despite his allegiance to it, problematizes the genre(s): Philip gains selfhood; Elspie gains a husband. The most significant fact concerning the sexual politics of The Bothie is that Philip remains, to the end, the undisputable focus of interest. Elspie is an appendage, albeit a very important one, in the journey that takes him off to the Antipodes. Elspie's fears about marriage come true: after she has said 'yes', her voice is drowned out and her future swallowed up in Philip's. The poem, as Bildungsroman, has charted the development and contours of Philip's subjectivity; it has no room for Elspie.

Aurora Leigh:

Like many other Künstlerromane, Aurora Leigh is highly conscious of its genre. The eponymous author-protagonist provides in the fifth book a sustained account of her revisionary feminist poetics, including a survey of poetic genres. Nevertheless, despite the fact that Aurora Leigh directly addresses the question "What form is best for poems?" (V.223), contemporary reviewers found the poem generically confused, or at least confusing. The Dublin University Magazine reviewer asked, characteristically: "From what point of view are we to regard this singular production? In what category of writings are we to class it? Is it a poetic novel of life, or a poetic romance?" ("Aurora Leigh" 469): The reviewer's taxonomic difficulty has been anticipated, however, as early as the first book, when Aurora warns her readers that her novel project may require unconventional forms. Aurora reflects on her fledgling attempts to model her work on that of earlier poets, only to produce "Mere lifeless imitations of live verse" (I.974); such failures convince her that established genres should not be espoused at the cost of fresh poetic spirit:

> Oft, the ancient forms
> Will thrill, indeed, in carrying the young blood.
> The wine-skins, now and then, a little warped,
> Will crack even, as the new wine gurgles in.
> Spare the old bottles!--spill not the new wine.
> (1.998-1002)

Her figure's emphasis on "new wine" is significant, for it suggests that it is literally Aurora Leigh's content, in addition to the new poetics, that requires the poem's departure from ensconced forms. The poem's (self-)representation of the protagonist's education as a person and a poet apparently involves a departure from established genres. Aurora Leigh thus claims to subvert the generic constraints to which women's lives have in literature been subservient. This shift away from established generic form in the attempt to represent a new female literary subject involves the two literary forms of the Bildungsroman and the romance which have served to inscribe the (normally male) subject, and the female subject of romance, respectively. The poem thus undertakes a complex negotiation of gendered narrative genres, and links its generic innovation to a model for political change. Although she is referring to twentieth-century female Kunstlerromane, Rachel DuPlessis's description of its important function applies equally to Aurora Leigh: "The woman writer creates the ethical role of the artist by making her imaginatively depict and try to change the life in which she is also immersed" (101).

Barrett Browning, as early as 1845, considered narrative experimentation central to her "completely modern" "novel-poem," which was to go "running into the midst of our conventions, & rushing into drawing-rooms and the like 'where angels fear to tread.'" She explained in a letter to Robert Browning that she had to wait for the idea to mature:

> I am waiting for a story, & I won't take one, because I want to make one, & I like to make my own stories, because then I can take liberties with them in the treatment. (Kintner I, 31)

Despite the implicit claim in this passage for the originality of the story, some readers of Aurora Leigh have considered the poem most conservative in its narrative structure. DuPlessis has pointed to the plot as evidence of the poem's failure to realize its subversive aims: she argues that in literature "the romance plot, broadly speaking, is a trope for the sex-gender system as a whole" (5). From her perspective, Aurora Leigh adheres to a conventional romantic plot in which the female protagonist initially refuses a marriage proposal out of loyalty to her own principles, only eventually to recognize her mistake and capitulate at the close of the text to the demands of her lover and patriarchal society. DuPlessis finds no indication of transgressive narrative techniques which would, in her terms, indicate critical dissent from social norms. She contrasts Aurora Leigh to later female Kunstlerromane: "Being an artist is, at the end, reinterpreted as self-sacrifice for the woman, and thus aligned with feminine ideology" (87). Even Rod Edmond, who argues that at least one "contemporary narrative convention [is] scrutinized and subverted" in the poem's cross-class marriage, criticizes its resolution for "more predictable and less interesting use of mid-nineteenth-century narrative convention" (162-63). Nevertheless, Aurora Leigh does critique and subvert the conservative implications of the romance plot, not through transcending or excluding it, but by working through it to arrive at the representation and performance of a dynamic female subject.

This subject is Aurora, the artist-speaker of the poem, who is constructed both by the narrative of her life and by her enactment of her voice and her views within the body of her eponymous text. It is not primarily the subversive implications of a first person female voice such as Aurora's that are my concern here, crucial as they are to the success of the poem; they are explored at length in the context of Webster's "A Castaway" in Chapter Four. My focus here is the relation of the establishment of Aurora as a speaking subject to the narrative which in large part constructs that subjectivity. A contrast between Aurora Leigh and Ignatia serves to highlight this approach: both poems present the powerful voice of a female protagonist telling her story, responding to the Romantic poetic legacy, and criticizing the social roles and treatment of women; yet the earlier poem ultimately differs in that it represents the protagonist's failure to attain vocation and independent subjectivity. One of the most crucial points of comparison between the two poems lies in the ways that each combines the Bildungsroman with the romance plot.

The opening book of Aurora Leigh fosters expectations of romance. Her cousin Romney Leigh enters as the orphaned Aurora, under her aunt's oppressive care, is pining for the Italy of her infancy. He is depicted as a romantic hero who may restore Aurora to health and happiness: "He would have saved me utterly, it seemed, / He stood and looked so" (I.541-42). When it later surfaces that a disqualifying clause in the family will has diverted Aurora's rightful fortune to Romney, economic propriety, reinforced by the wishes of their deceased fathers, decrees that the cousins must marry. And, true to convention, they are reunited at the climax of the poem. This sequence is, however, merely a part of a larger narrative which involves much more than the tropes and trappings of conventional romance.

Romney's romantic designs on Aurora are subjected to close scrutiny, and that examination encompasses the most decisive narrative moment in the poem.

The first books of *Aurora Leigh*, combine the suggestion of romance with a much stronger narrative of *Bildung*, of Aurora's embattled development and education. Her education begins at the hand of her widowed father in Italy, who, knowing nothing of child rearing, educates her in the classics without regard for her sex or her age: "He wrapt his little daughter in his large / Man's doublet, careless did it fit or no" (I. 727-28). This education is abruptly interrupted: her father dies when she is thirteen. It is significant that it is at the onset of puberty that socializing forces, in the shape of her aunt, intrude to inflict upon Aurora a conventional middle-class female education. She experiences her aunt's strictures and restrictions, the mind-numbingly superficial knowledge and trivial accomplishments, and the repression of emotion and self-expression as all the more traumatic after her formerly liberal upbringing. The description of the impact of this treatment on Aurora recalls Cobbe's parody of wax-molding theories of women's nature; the passage also represents such character-moulding as extreme violence to and violation of individual Romantic subjectivity:

> . . . I only thought
> Of lying quiet there where I was thrown
> Like sea-weed on the rocks, and suffering her
> To prick me to a pattern with her pin,
> Fibre from fibre, delicate leaf from leaf,
> And dry out from my drowned anatomy
> The last sea-salt left in me. (I.378-84)

As is typical of the *Bildungsroman*, Aurora finds her formal education quite inconsequential to her inner development. Nurtured by nature like many a Romantic, she draws from its "elemental nutriment and heat" sufficient strength to resist a process of female socialization which is represented, appropriately enough, as an almost sexual attempt at penetration:

> I kept the life thrust on me, on the outside
> Of the inner life with all its ample room
> For heart and lungs, for will and intellect,
> Inviolable by conventions. (I.474; 477-80)

She revives, eventually continues her own education in secret with her dead father's books, chances finally upon the poets, and discovers her vocation. "At poetry's divine first finger-touch," she says, her soul "Let go conventions and sprang up surprised" (I.851-52). She now finds herself penetrated, "ravished" away to be cup-bearer to the gods of poetry, and begins her apprenticeship (I.920).

Central to Aurora Leigh's first book, then, is a sustained narrative of Bildung, of Aurora's development of subjectivity, and a Romantic subjectivity at that. The hints of the role that Romney is to play are muted and few, until the second book and Aurora's twentieth birthday, when the Bildungsroman plot, and with it Aurora's corresponding sense of her self, is challenged by the possibility of romance. Prefatory to his marriage proposal, Romney mocks her poetic aspirations, denies her capacity for abstract thought, and provides the following assessment of women:

> "Women as you are,
> Mere women, personal and passionate,
> You give us doating mothers, and perfect wives,
> Sublime Madonnas, and enduring saints!
> We get no Christ from you,--and verily
> We shall not get a poet, in my mind." (II.220-25)

It becomes apparent that his conviction of essential sexual difference, separate natures, and separate spheres underlies Romney's ensuing proposal that Aurora become his wife and give "what she only can" and "Place [her] fecund heart" in his (II.350; 375). She rejects his exhortations to join him in his social philanthropy, asserting that the love he offers is insufficient for a marriage:

"What you love
Is not a woman, Romney, but a cause:
You want a helpmate, not a mistress, sir,
A wife to help your ends,--in her no end."
(II.400-403)

Romney charges her with desire for a romance, for proper poetic wooing of the "'Lady, thou art wondrous fair'" variety, but is indignantly rebuked with charges of sexism:

"You misconceive the question like a man,
Who sees a woman as the complement
Of his sex merely." (II.428; 434-36)

Aurora exposes the inequality of the marriage proposal, and by implication the marriage plot, which assumes that a woman should simply adopt the name, life, and vocation of a man who offers her "love". Her creed is that "every creature, female as the male, / Stands single in responsible act and thought" (II.437-38).

Thus although Romney characterizes himself, by emphasizing the unromantic truth he uses in wooing, as standing in opposition to romantic love, he represents the competing narrative possibility of romantic narrative which threatens to derail _Aurora Leigh_'s _Bildungsroman_ plot. Aurora counters his offer with an assertion of the Romantic subjectivity established by the narrative in Book I: "I too have my vocation,--work to do" (II.455). Romney's accusations of bookish romantic notions are soon repeated by her aunt, and again countered by expressions of independent selfhood. Her revelation that Aurora has been disinherited because of her foreign mother, and that her father and Romney's had hoped for the cousins' union long ago, only strengthens Aurora's conviction that such a marriage would mean entrapment and enslavement:

If I married him,
I should not dare to call my soul my own
Which so he had bought and paid for: every thought
And every heart-beat down there in the bill;

> Not one found honestly deductible
> From any use that pleased him! (II.785-90)

This passage participates in the common Victorian denunciation of mercantile marriages at the expense of sentimental and companionate ones; it is nonetheless an equally strong assertion of the opposition between the type of marriage Romney opposes and the subjectivity Aurora is fighting to maintain. Romney, with the romantic narrative trajectory he represents, thus demystifies the role allotted to women in the conventional romantic marriage plot. This role necessarily denies women autonomy and subjectivity, by casting them as help-meets, personal supporters of men in their public, and in Romney's case political, vocations. However, in the case of Aurora Leigh, the Bildungsroman plot triumphs over the romantic. Romney's proposal prompts Aurora's first extended exposition of her poetic vocation, and the following books depict her successful pursuit of her ambition.

Aurora Leigh further critiques the marriage plot through Romney's abortive attempt to marry Marian, the "daughter of the people" (III.806). Their relationship not only buttresses the poem's earlier condemnation of bourgeois marriage based on the inequality of the sexes; it also extends that critique to radical politics imbued with paternalism, of the sort espoused by Romney and also by Philip in The Bothie. The projected marriage of Romney and Marian, as an "intermarriage reasoned out," recalls that of Philip and Elspie; like theirs, it is meant to collapse class difference through, paradoxically, maintaining gender difference (IV.690). As Rod Edmond observes, Aurora Leigh explores the "difficulties and self-deceptions" of cross-class marriages such as that in The Bothie (162).

It is the story of Romney and Marian, not of Romney and Aurora, which, at least initially, follows the archetypal female romantic narrative. As Nina Auerbach remarks, "In the best tradition of fairy tale princes, the wealthy Romney . . . reache[s] down to 'save' Marian from her abased class and gender (Woman and the Demon 169). The romance and marriage Romney offers both women are similar, though in the case of Marian his principles are taken to a parodic extreme. The marriages are alike in terms of the sexual and economic inequality on which they are predicated, but Aurora's social status and education place her in a better position than Marian. While Romney's desire to save Aurora "utterly" is frustrated by her refusal, Marian describes to Aurora how he "raised and rescued" her from what was indeed a desperate situation (III.1224). And although Aurora declines, as she says, to be the "handmaid" or "Hagar" to the beloved social theory which is Romney's "Lawful spouse," Marian submits to Romney's use of her as a tool for building a bridge between the classes, and, in a continuation of the Hagar metaphor, determines to "prove the handmaid and the wife at once / Serve tenderly and love obediently" because she knows herself "[m]uch fitter for his handmaid than his wife" (II.413; IV.228-29; 227).

Marian accepts the offer of marriage which Aurora refuses, and with it the conventional ideology of women's inferior subjectivity summed up by Aurora as their "Potential faculty in everything / Of abdicating power in it" (I.441-42). Marian accepts the lot of relative creature and reflection of Romney's desires. As such she accords with the womanly ideal articulated by Coventry Patmore, who described "the ideal position of woman towards man" in precisely these terms: "She only really loves and desires to become what he loves and desires her to be" (Religio Poetae 161-62). Marian would indeed have become the angel in

Romney's house, or, rather, phalanstery, had Lady Waldemar not persuaded her that it would be even more unselfish of her and ultimately best for Romney if she fled the marriage. Marian's initial refusal to marry him is therefore the obverse of the claim to independent subjectivity implicit in Aurora's refusal.

The story of Marian and Romney critiques patriarchal romance by correlating the projected marriage's disastrous outcome with the degree to which Marian is the type of wife Romney desires. According to Patmore, the substantial inequalities involved in their relationship are not only beneficial but essential to marital bliss: "All joy worth the name is in equal love between unequals;" "the incomparable happiness of love between the sexes is . . . founded upon their inequality" (158; 163). In Patmore's terms, the marriage seems triply fated to succeed, since Marian and Romney will enjoy the benefits of sexual, class, and economic inequality. However, it ultimately fails because Marian is convinced that she brings nothing at all to the marriage. Furthermore, the horrific outcome parodies Romney's insistence on sexual inequality. He planned to use Marian to satisfy his (philanthropic) desires, and to possess her publicly in St. Giles Church. Marian's rape takes his plans to a nightmarish but logical extreme, for rape is the paradigmatic narrative of female powerlessness and subjection. In effect, Marian's narrative exposes the most vicious implications of the ideology of female subservience in the romantic plot. Marian characterizes her rape as murder; however, Aurora reveals the projected marriage as equally murderous when she makes an incisive comparison between the complete obliteration of Marian's self in marriage and the Indian custom of suttee:

> . . . [C]ertain brides of Europe duly ask
> To mount the pile as Indian widows do,
> The spices of their tender youth heaped up,

> The jewels of their gracious virtues worn,
> More gems, more glory, -- to consume entire
> For a living husband: as the man's alive,
> Not dead, the woman's duty by so much
> Advanced in England beyond Hindostan.
> (IV.195-202)

One of the more startling outcomes of Marian's story is the suggestion that marriage to Romney represents an even less desirable alternative than the horrific rape and its aftermath which lead Marian to a sense of herself as a subject.[21]

In addition to presenting a radical critique of the conventional romance plot's dependence on female inequality, passivity, and subjection, Marian's story helps to further de-center the romance between Aurora and Romney. Aurora aside, we learn more of Marian than any other character in the novel-poem, including Romney; she occupies a full third of the poem and shifts the focus of the work away from the earlier romantic dilemma towards the homosocial bond between Marian and Aurora.. Marian's story in fact introduces the quest motif common to many Bildungsromane, as Aurora's pensive longing for the disappeared Marian eventuates in an active quest for her: .

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[21] Kathleen Blake similarly asserts: "She is cast upon her own resources and thereby finds them" (Love 184). One clear indication that Marian has found her own resources is the extent to which her second refusal of Romney echoes Aurora's first in its assertion of selfhood:

> . . . I, who felt myself unworthy once
> Of virtuous Romney and his high-born race,
> Have come to learn,--a woman, poor or rich,
> Despised or honoured, is a human soul . . .
> (IX.326-29)

She tells him that she now knows she did not love him, but only thought "To be your slave, you help, your toy, your tool. / To be your love . . . I never thought of that" (IX.370-71; ellipses in original).

> No Marian; nowhere Marian. Almost, now,
> I could call Marian, Marian, with the shriek
> Of desperate creatures calling for the Dead.
> Where is she, was she? was she anywhere?
> (VI.255-58)

The quest which motivates the middle section of *Aurora Leigh* is again more typical of *Bildungsroman* than romance, and more common for a male than a female protagonist. As Marlon B. Ross notes, "Quest and conquest . . . though able to be appropriated by women, are historically the means through which men have appropriated power for themselves over women" (49).

Aurora's central quest for Marian thus shifts the structure of the poem further away from the conventions of romantic narrative. This quest, however, not only marks the poem's allegiance to Romantic paradigms of the literary construction of subjectivity, but at the same time recalls Smith's contention that the establishment of the male subject in the Romantic *Bildungsroman* requires a female "other" or quest object. Marian also seems to fulfil the function of quest-object in other respects. She is, as Angela Leighton has compellingly argued, Aurora's muse of "contemporaneity and commitment" (*Elizabeth Barrett Browning* 154). Once Aurora takes up Marian's cause she is able to address concretely the problems of her age, and thereby achieve the artistic goals she elaborated earlier in the poem. However, as Joyce Zonana has noted, this begs the question of whether Aurora's poetic voice and subjectivity are, like male Romantic subjectivity, constructed at the expense of yet another female object: "If Aurora's identification with Marian is to be the radically feminist act Leighton . . . takes it to be, then Marian must cease to be an object to Aurora" (243).

At first glance, Marian would seem to play feminized and objectified other to Aurora's masculinized subject. Their relationship seems to approximate the basic structure of bourgeois, heterosexual marriage. Aurora, on discovering Marian in Paris, makes a proposal that can be read as paternalistic--albeit in maternalistic language--and condescending:

> "Come with me, sweetest sister," I returned,
> "And sit with me within my house and do me good
> From henceforth, thou and thine! ye are my own
> From henceforth. I am lonely in the world,
> And thou are lonely, and the child is half
> An orphan. Come,--and henceforth thou and I
> Being still together will not miss a friend,
> Nor he a father, since two mothers shall
> Make that up to him. (VII.117-25)

Indeed, their life in Italy seems to replicate conventional sex roles and division of labour. Aurora takes initiative to establish the union, and possesses financial, social and (socially determined) moral superiority over Marian. Aurora provides a home and sits and writes poetry about Marian, while Marian cares for the child and takes pains to ensure that its noise does not disturb Aurora's work.

Nevertheless, although the relationship between Marian and Aurora certainly approximates a heterosexual marriage, this reading of it disregards some essential differences, not the least of which is that it involves two women. The "true epithalamium" of Aurora Leigh, according to Auerbach, is "the mutual salvation of Marian and Aurora" (Woman and the Demon 151). The agent of rescue in this narrative is not male, nor, as Auerbach's stress on mutuality indicates, does agency and power reside in only one of the parties. The reciprocity of the relationship is evident from the outset: despite the benefits Aurora offers, Marian is clearly prepared to refuse if she dislikes the terms. And despite her advantages, Aurora, who is plagued by fears that Romney will marry

Lady Waldemar, needs Marian's support to complete the journey to Italy. Aurora neatly expresses the reciprocity of the relationship when she writes "Sweet the help / Of one we have helped" (VII.513-14). The narrative of Aurora's quest for and relationship with Marian thus performs a number of important functions in Aurora Leigh. It denaturalizes the heterosexual romance plot as the only plot for women, and heterosexual marriage as the only viable option. It supports the claims of both women to independence and subjectivity and, as a literary community of women, offers a "rebuke to the conventional ideal of a solitary woman living for and through men, attaining citizenship in the community of adulthood through masculine approval alone. The communities of women . . . are emblems of female self-sufficiency" (Auerbach, Communities 5). Lastly, even as it offers an alternative to the cultural imperative of marriage, the relationship also suggests that marriage need not be patriarchal and exploitative. The union of Aurora and Marian indicates that gender roles can be modified to permit human interaction founded on complementary strengths and mutual needs rather than patronage and inequality.

The quest for Marian also, as already observed, contributes to the Bildungsroman plot of Aurora Leigh. Yet the poem does not rest with the conventional construction of the protagonist's Romantic subjectivity at the expense of a female object. There are two primary reasons why Aurora Leigh effects this radical revision in the narrative construction of subjectivity. First of all, Aurora is a female rather than a male subject; hence the possibility for slippage between the two categories of subject and object is greatly increased. Such slippage is illustrated in the way that Aurora the poet is frequently characterized as a muse by her friends and readers. If the poem establishes her muse Marian as a subject, such slippage becomes less threatening. Secondly, the poem's emancipatory poetics extend beyond the establishment of a single female subjectivity: Aurora is not a Romantic exception but an exemplary prototype who claims her voice and selfhood on behalf of other women as well as herself. Her identification with Marian, not an objectification of her as muse and other, is what allows Aurora to achieve her poetic goals. She writes: "I tell her story and grow passionate;" "all my soul rose up to take her part" (III.847; VII.115). Aurora Leigh not only tells Marian's story, but also incorporates Marian's voice. Her scathing condemnation of patriarchal society has the authority of experience, and the final view of Marian emphasizes, repeatedly, the power of her voice in contrast to her previous diffidence:

> The thrilling, solemn voice, so passionless,
> Sustained, yet low, without a rise or fall,
> As one who had authority to speak,
> And not as Marian. (IX.248-51)

Furthermore, Marian is not swallowed up into Aurora's narrative at the conclusion of Aurora Leigh, as Elspie is into Philip's at the close of The Bothie. In declining Romney's offer of marriage and Aurora's counsel that she accept, Marian again refuses, this time consciously, the fairy-tale narrative of romance, and asserts her own right as a subject to determine the course of her life.

The liberties that Barrett Browning takes with the plot of Aurora Leigh thus combine to represent Aurora's acceptance of Romney at the close of the poem as a real choice, rather than a social or narrative imperative. Aurora is established as a Romantic subject through a sustained plot of Bildung. That subjectivity is enacted also through Aurora's voice, which narrates the poem and in so doing realizes her poetic goals. Following the commencement of the

Bildungsroman, Aurora Leigh raises expectations of romance, only to subvert them. The Bildungsroman triumphs, Romney takes up a marginal role in the bulk of the narrative, and Marian Erle's story both critiques and presents an alternative to heterosexual romance plots. Most important of all perhaps, is the fact that the form of Aurora Leigh attests to the success of its Bildungsroman and the Kunstlerroman, and even their integration with the plot of romance: written as it is in Aurora's voice in the past tense, Aurora Leigh is literally a text that writes beyond its ending.[22]

Novel Forms

The tension between Bildungsroman and romance in Ignatia, The Bothie, and Aurora Leigh, can be usefully considered in the context of Rachel DuPlessis' notion of "writing beyond the ending." The endings to which she refers are, of course, the "resolutions of romance," either "successful courtship, marriage" or "death" (1), and her emphasis on them, and the importance of writing "beyond" them, grows out of her analysis of the romance plot as "a trope for the sex-gender system as a whole" (5). DuPlessis looks to twentieth-century fiction by women for narratives that subvert conventional female plots because, she argues, only

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[22] As Dorothy Mermin argues, Barrett Browning's life, in which she too wrote beyond the marriage ending, gave added credence to the conclusion: "The fact of the Brownings' happy marriage assures us that Aurora will live happily ever after and--the poem being in that sense a self-fulfilling prophecy--continue to write. Had Barrett Browning not already done it, reviewers would have said it was impossible" (Elizabeth Barrett Browning 220).

> [w]hen women as a social group question, and have the economic, political, and legal power to sustain and return to questions of marriage law, divorce, the "couverte" status, and their access to vocation, then the relation of narrative middles to resolutions will destabilize culturally, and novelists will begin to "write beyond" the romantic ending. (4)

For these reasons, DuPlessis asserts that the narrative shift she examines could not occur in England until the 1880's, when changes such as the Married Women's Property Act of 1882 "sharply modified" the "ideological and material bases of narrative choice . . . not just on an individual, but on a cultural level."[23]

The importance ascribed by DuPlessis to the romance plot is clearly borne out by the significance we have seen it play in Victorian narrative poetry. Yet, although all three of the poems considered here appeared decades before the 1880s, Ignatia (1838), The Bothie (1848), and Aurora Leigh (1856) nonetheless demonstrate an increasingly articulate interrogation of the romance plot. Aurora Leigh, as I argued above, both indicates "dissent from an ideological formation by attacking elements of narrative that repeat, sustain, or embody" social norms and works through the romance plot to a subversive Kunstlerroman that literally as well as figuratively writes beyond the romantic ending (DuPlessis 34).

Another approach to the question of the relation between literature and cultural hegemony is suggested by another generic issue raised by the poems considered in this chapter. In addition to probing the gender gap between the romance and the Bildungsroman, these three texts also trace the evolution of one of the nineteenth-century's more influential poetic forms, the verse novel. Of the three, Ignatia remains most closely aligned to Romantic verse narratives of inner growth and development, particularly insofar as it refuses historical or geographic specificity; yet the intrusion of social concerns into Ignatia's story and the poem's detailed narrative point to the novelization of the narrative poem. The texts by Clough and Barrett Browning combine the romantic narrative of development with more novelistic features such as specificity, topicality, dialogue, and political debate to produce key examples of the verse novel.[24] The appearance of such features signals an important shift in literary forms which both made possible and was occasioned by a coeval shift in ideological debate. The implications of such a shift are usefully elucidated in Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the novel.

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[23] DuPlessis, 4. DuPlessis lists in a footnote the reasons, "not [her] subject," for situating the 1880s as "a significant moment for these narrative ruptures." Drawing on Jeffrey Weeks, she cites, in addition to the Married Women's Property Act "which gave wives a legal identity and the right to keep their own earnings," the "earliest critiques of 'Victorianism,'" increased state intervention in the family and sexuality, improving divorce procedures; and the availability of birth control information (199 fn 12). Clearly I am taking issue not simply with the choice of date or with what I consider predetermined assessments of Victorian texts such as Aurora Leigh, but with the model for generic change that DuPlessis propounds.

In Bakhtin's idiosyncratic use of the word, the novel has no necessary connection to prose fiction--Pushkin's poem Evgenij Onegin is one of his favourite examples--but is instead characterized by "living contact with unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality," by which Bakhtin means that the novel is the only genre that is not a "more or less fixed and pre-existing" form (Dialogic Imagination 7). Rather, the novel is, in his words, "the genre of becoming" which can absorb, modify, and parody existing genres (22). The

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[24] Raymond Colander's dissertation on the Victorian verse-novel presents a good argument for the development of the genre as a response to a growing demand that poetry be social, contemporary, and relevant. More recently, Patrick Murphy has argued the form as a modern poetic genre in a Bakhtinian approach to twentieth-century texts by authors such as Wallace Stevens and Robertson Jeffers.

Bothie's mock-epic verve and its juxtaposition of satiric and pastoral modes are in Bakhtin's terms signs of novelization; likewise, the "unscrupulously epic" quality of Aurora Leigh makes that poem, as Marjorie Stone has argued, "a particularly striking example of what Bakhtin terms the 'novelized' epic" ("Genre Subversion" 126).[25] The aspect of Victorian narrative poetry which has been my focus here, namely the interrogation of romance and its friction with the Bildungsroman, is another compelling mark of Bakhtinian novelization. As translator Michael Holquist remarks, "'novel' is the name Bakhtin gives to whatever force is at work within a given literary system to reveal the limits, the artificial constraints of that system . . . . [N]ovelization is fundamentally anticanonical. It will not permit generic monologue" (Dialogic Imagination xxxi).[26]

The political significance of generic dialogue is indicated in Bakhtin's essay "Epic and Novel." The epic is an inherently conservative genre in his analysis, because the "field available for representing the world" in the epic is limited by the fact that it "knows only a single and unified world view" (Dialogic Imagination 27, 35). As a result, the epic, which he places in contradistinction to the novel, does not participate in any form of cultural contestation since there is no ideological conflict in the world which it depicts. The world of the novel, in contrast, is as open and contested as that of the epic is closed and static, with the result that the protagonist cannot, as in the novel, represent the sole dominant world view, but only one of many conflicting ones; she or he is always "more or less an ideologue" (38). In short, the generic dialogue and the linguistic dialogism which mark the novel make novelized forms participants as representations in the contemporary world with all its conflicts, instabilities, and debates: they belong to "the ongoing event of current life in which we, the author and readers, are intimately participating" (30-31).

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[25] The combination of genres in The Bothie has received little attention although commentators regularly deal with the mock-epic aspect of the poem. Houghton, however, describes Clough as the first poet to put into practice the theory of the new, modern poem of the age (95). Edmond presents a sensitive reading of the effect of the shift to pastoral in the conclusion. In addition to Stone's Bakhtinian approach, excellent treatments of the subversive combinations of genre that make up Aurora Leigh, and some of the implications for gender, are provided by Dorothy Mermin, "Genre and Gender," and Susan Stanford Friedman, "H.D. and Elizabeth Barrett Browning."

[26] Novelization also has more specific implications for gender, as is clear from the increasing tendency of diverse theorists and literary historians to link the rise of the novel to gender in a variety of ways. See, for example, Christine van Boheemen, Frances Ferguson, and Nancy Armstrong. Gender is certainly not one of Bakhtin's concerns, but it is noteworthy that one of his few references to women's literature is the observation that one of the variants of the nineteenth-century novel is "the testing . . . of the emancipated woman" (Dialogic Imagination 390).

Bakhtin's analysis makes clear the connection between the novel and actual political debate, and implies that the novel works against social monologism and political hegemony. Thus, the novelization resulting from the interrogation of gendered literary forms marks the narrative poems I have discussed as participants in cultural contestation. Bakhtin thus clarifies the connection between generic and social change, and suggests an interactive relationship different from that assumed by DuPlessis. Literary forms do not merely reflect changes effected in the ideological and material base. Instead, literary changes, which themselves perform ideological work, affect as well as respond to material, ideological, and political conditions.

The connections between genre and material conditions become particularly apparent when female subjectivity becomes a representational issue. The implications for female subjectivity underlying romance as a genre necessarily coincide with the assumptions underwriting the practice of marriage in the nineteenth-century in general, and the legal principle of coverture in particular. Coverture meant that a married woman was politically and legally incorporated in her husband, in terms of agency, property, and existence. Romance, whose teleological inscription of women assumes marriage as its symbolic center, focuses on a moment of social contradiction: a moment of female freedom and autonomy predicated on the assumption that these attributes, and subjectivity itself, must be relinquished. Despite the subversive potential often activated in representations of the swan-song of female subjectivity, the ideological allegiances of romance remain with the principal of coverture, subsumation, and subjection. The three poems covered here trace a growing interrogation of and dissatisfaction with the limitations that the romance/Bildungsroman split imposed on the representation of women's lives. The increasing questioning of received genres inscribing male and female subjectivity is closely intertwined with an opening up of social debate that involved increased questioning of social forms. The generic debate considered here can thus be seen to be interwoven with the debate over the Woman Question and, in particular, the first critiques of coverture and the agitation against it in the campaign to reform married women's property laws in the latter part of the century.

There was certainly a degree of awareness among the educated classes about the unenviable legal position of married women in the earlier Victorian period.[27] However, the first real stir over the state of the law, and the campaign to change it, began with the publication in 1854 of A Brief Summary in Plain Language of the Most Important Laws of England Concerning Women by Barbara Leigh Smith. Smith succinctly outlined the principle of coverture as follows: "A man and wife are one person in law; the wife loses all her rights as a single woman, and her existence is entirely absorbed in that of her husband" (6). Later editions also emphasized that a wife's legal rights were exceeded not only by those of single women but also of single mothers who, unlike married ones, had undisputable custody of their children (Bodichon 4). Smith's easily accessible pamphlet--it was short, straight-forward, and inexpensive--sold rapidly. In combination with Caroline Norton's articulate and notorious accounts of the marital and custodial injustices fostered by a wife's "'non-existence' in law," Smith's pamphlet quickly made married women's property law a prominent subject of debate in the press.[28]

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[27] Caroline Norton publicized the injuries she had received at the hands of her husband and the English common law from the late 1830s (Caroline Norton's Defence). Harriet Martineau makes a passing reference in Morals and

A Brief Summary argues that marriage constitutes the end of female independence, identity, and subjectivity, which is the same critique we have seen directed at romance. Smith allows Judge Hurlbut to sum up the implications of coverture: "'In short, a woman is courted and wedded as an angel, and yet denied the dignity of a rational and moral being ever after" (9). To convince legislators of the necessity for change, Smith formed the Married Women's Property Committee in 1855 to organize the signing of a petition for reform. This

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Manners (60), and Harriet Taylor's "The Enfranchisement of Women" in the 1851 Westminster Review quotes the demand of the U.S. Women's Rights Convention (1850) for "a thorough revisal" of married persons' property law (Harriet Taylor Mill 95).

[28] Norton, "Letter to the Queen" in Hollis, Women in Public 181. For accounts of the Married Women's Property Campaign, see Mary Lyndon Shanley, Shiela Herstein, and Helsinger et al, vol. 2: 3-39.

committee was, by Sheila R. Herstein's account, the first instance of feminist organization in Britain, and it attained an impressive list of 24,000 signatures in less than four months. Among the many prominent names was that of Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Despite her reservations about other feminist issues such as suffrage, she pledged public support for the campaign to remove married women from the legal status of relative creatures.[29] The reception of the petition in Parliament was enthusiastic, even if it took until 1882 for all the desired measures to be enacted. Herstein summarizes the political legacy of Smith and her Committee:

> All feminist activity for the next half century was an extension of that first cooperative effort, while every effort by women on their own behalf stemmed from Barbara Smith's expressed conviction that women, when organized and active, could affect their own destiny. (94)

Neither literary forms nor social consciousness were static prior to the 1880s. The Married Women's Property campaign helped to effect the move towards the later legislative change in women's political and legal status, as activists such as Smith Bodichon defined and publicized a previously unregarded issue. Changes such as the Married Women's Property Act involve profound shifts in the perception of what is writeble, readable, tenable, and thinkable, and must be preceded as well as accompanied by alteration in the ideological structures which, in Althusser's view function as a system of representations which governs lived experience. The clash staged between romance and Bildungsroman in Ignatia and The Bothie, and successfully negotiated in Aurora Leigh, is evidence of the shifting of narrative and hence ideological formations in nineteenth-century Victorian England. The relation between social formation and narrative modes is thus not straight-forward cause and effect as DuPlessis suggests: the ideological shift enabled material changes in women's status to occur and was itself in turn substantiated and modified by them. More bluntly, women relied on new representations for subjectivity as they enacted, experienced, and constructed new subjectivities for themselves.

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[29] Barbara Leigh Smith's middle name suggests a possible source for the surname of Aurora Leigh, which Barrett Browning chose fairly late in the composition of the poem. A few details supporting such a speculation are the proximity in date between the meeting of the two women and the publication of Aurora Leigh, Smith's independence and unconventionality, that Smith was an artist (painter), and that the legacy that permitted her to remain single, independent, and unconventional, until she married by choice, was 300 pounds, the same amount as Aurora's. If Aurora's first name is read as a reference to Coventry Patmore's Angel in the House as "auroral," her two names embody the split between romance and Bildungsroman.

The question may arise as to the validity of talking about the literary construction of subjectivity as if it were synonymous with the construction of subjectivity in real subjects. Yet the ambiguity in the foregoing discussion is employed advisedly, for part of my argument is for a continuity between female subjectivity as constructed in literature and as constructed in life. This is not to say that the same forces operate in both instances, but rather that literary representations are one of the many forms of representations within which lived subjectivities are constructed. In this respect, I take issue with Nancy Miller's contention that "the plots of women's literature are not about 'life' or solutions in any therapeutic sense, nor should they be. They are about the plots of literature itself, about the constraints the maxim places on rendering a female life in fiction" ("Emphasis Added" 46). Although the latter point is valid, it does not mean that there can be no connection between literary and lived maxims or constraints, particularly in the perception of living subjects who experience both as diverse representations.

Laurence Lipking notes that there is substantial evidence for the argument that how they are represented is a matter of great importance to women, even to the extent that living female subjects exert themselves to modify literary representations of women:

> The charge made by Telemachus and Wellek and almost every male critic between them, that women react to literature by thinking about themselves, is sustained not only by prejudice but by massive evidence from the writings of women. When Samuel Richardson's female correspondents implored him to spare Clarissa's life, they clearly felt their own lives were at stake. A literary theory based on such evidence cannot pretend to be impersonal. (216-17)

While it can be difficult to gauge what impact a particular representation has on lived subjects, fortunately, in the case of Aurora Leigh we have some indication. I refer not to the phenomenal sales of the poem, nor even its literary legacy, but to its effects on women readers.[30] Barrett Browning reported with glee that young girls, perhaps in emulation of Aurora's defiance of her aunt, were defying their mothers' attempts to keep them from reading the poem. Aurora Leigh was also welcomed with enthusiasm by numerous female writers and feminists. One moving testimony to the impact of the poem is provided by Susan B. Anthony, who carried a copy of it everywhere as an inspirational model even as she set about realizing its vision of female subjectivity (Lutz 74-76).

The notion of the relationship between the female Bildungsroman and the establishment of independent female subjectivity also suggests current debate over the prominence of the contemporary feminist Bildungsroman. For although within the dominant literary tradition the Bildungsroman is considered a bankrupt form which can at best be parodied, the female version retains a central position in women's writing (Felski, "Novel" 137; Abel et al 13). The genre's staying power as a form, like its rise in the nineteenth-century, is intimately related to the conditions of women's lives. Having largely, if imperfectly, achieved the goals of nineteenth-century feminism for formal equality--for example, suffrage, legal reform, educational and professional opportunity--middle-class women and women writers in Britain and North America have achieved a subject-position which begins, in the words of the editors of The Voyage In, "to approach that of the traditional male Bildungsheld." But although, as they also note "the primary assumption underlying the Bildungsroman--the evolution of a coherent self--has come under attack in modernist and avant-garde fiction," women writers and readers are not ready to discard the form (Abel at al 13). Their reluctance no doubt derives from the fact that although many women possess formal equality with men, they do not enjoy substantive equality in life, work, or representational practices. Unfortunately, this is not the historical moment when most women can assume their subjectivity enough to deconstruct it safely. And, also unfortunately, they have inherited some of the representational conflicts of nineteenth-century female narrative. Doris Lessing's The Golden Notebook, to use the example of a female Kunstlerroman published more than a century after Aurora Leigh, attests to the abiding necessity of working through paradigms of romance. As Karen Chase persuasively argues, an otherwise conservative genre such as the Bildungsroman still has emancipatory resonances for women:

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[30] Aurora Leigh inspired numerous verse novels, including Emily Hickey's Michael Villiers, Idealist, Violet Fane's Denzil Place, and Marguerite Power's Virginia's Hand, as well as influencing women writers, such as Emily Dickinson (see Mermin, Elizabeth Barrett Browning 207) and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps (The Story of Avis, 1877), who wrote in other genres

> Our persistent contemporary urge to undo the marriages of our heroines need not be interpreted as a desire to send them off to public life--to have them run for office, to have them found a colony--but more fundamentally and more simply as a desire to display female subjectivity, unencumbered, unadorned, unassimilated. (15-16)

Such a literary form, and indeed realist narrative (as distinct from the novel in Bakhtin's idiosyncratic sense) has its own ideological effects and costs. Realist narrative as a form colludes with the Romantic individualistic allegiances of these texts. And, as Christine van Boheemen, among others, has argued of the novel, "the genre is itself product and embodiment of rationalist conceptualizations of transcendent subjectivity" (4).[31]

But my argument here is not for or against the realistic narrative, transcendent subjectivity, or even the Bakhtinian novel. Rather it is for a reading of three narrative poems, Ignatia, The Bothie, and Aurora Leigh, as participants in the development of a narrative of female subjectivity that had a powerful cogency for Victorian women for specific historical reasons, and that as such these poems partake of the historical development of new forms of subjectivity that evaded the constraints of romance and marriage for women in Victorian literature and life.

To return to the Frances Power Cobbe essay with which I began, these representational issues are, despite their complex embodiments and implications, quite simple. Cobbe outlines two categories for theories of the "Final Cause of Woman" as follows:

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[31] Historically, that notion of subjectivity has been implicitly connected to narrative; as Peter Brooks points out, Rousseau, considered the question of identity intelligible only in narrative terms, the story of a life (33). See Felski, "Novel" 144, for a summary of the views of the ideological force of realist narrative expressed by such critics as Stephen Heath, Rosalind Coward and John Ellis, Catherine Belsey, and Julia Kristeva.

> The first Order of types or conceptions of female character are those which are based on the theory that the final cause of the existence of Woman is the service she can render to Man. They may be described as "The types of Woman, considered as an Adjective."
>
> The second Order comprehends those conceptions which are based on the theory that Woman was created for some end proper to herself. They may be called "The types of Woman, considered as a Noun." (6)

In the complex negotiations between romance and Bildungsroman in the changing narratives of women in Victorian poetry the same grammatical issue is at stake: whether we are to read woman as an Adjective or as a Noun. The fight of Victorian women to attain the cultural status of subjects took place on many fronts: in political life, where women battled laws which denied their existence and independence; in literature, where dominant literary inscriptions of "woman as the complements of [men's] sex merely" were interrogated through novel literary forms; and in individual lives, where these and innumerable other representations and material practices converged in the formation of new, perhaps even novel, subjectivities.

CHAPTER THREE:

Dramatic Differences: Voice, Vocation, and Closet Drama

Speculations on Gender, Genre, and Literary History

Victorian women poets experimented with practically every genre that men poets did. They wrote narrative poetry, as the previous chapter demonstrates, with some of the same preoccupations that such poetry by men demonstrated. While Aurora Leigh demonstrates artistic self-consciousness on an epic scale, there were also "lady poets" and "poetesses" who wrote lyrics equally with "gentlemen poets" and "poets". Victorian women wrote elegies, satires, love poems, sentimental meditations, hymns and religious verse, political poems, odes, apostrophes, poems for charities, and occasional poems. Women poets frequently wrote in one of the period's most distinctive forms, the dramatic monologue, which is the subject of the following chapter. But Victorian women poets did not write drama, at least not for the theatre.[1]

Few Victorian poets actually wrote for the stage. Coleridge, with Remorse, had been the only Romantic poet to even approach theatrical success.[2]

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[1] Some Victorian women wrote drama in prose, although it would be difficult to discern from the secondary material that there were any female playwrights during the Victorian period at all. For a list of female dramatists see Appendix A of James Ellis' English Drama of the Nineteenth Century: An Index and Finding Guide. Works by the women listed are found in the Readex Microprint Collection English and American Drama of the Nineteenth Century. Of the nineteenth-century drama by women actually produced, an overwhelming proportion was staged in the 1880s and 1890s. My initial research in this area indicates that the female-authored plays produced in those two decades may well outnumber those staged in the rest of the century.

[2] Cross, 15; on the Romantics and theatre, see the collection edited by Richard Allen Cave, particularly Timothy Webb's "The Romantic Poet and the Stage: A Short, Sad History," 9-46.

Robert Browning, of course, wrote drama for the stage early in his career, but turned, following a hostile reception, to infusing poetry with drama.[3] Tennyson had five plays performed in his lifetime, but none successfully until the posthumous production of *Becket* in 1893.[4] Henry Arthur Jones in 1891 declared "the English theatre" to be "the worst and deadliest enemy of the English drama" (see Turner 387). Elizabeth Barrett Browning's comment on the state of Victorian theatre in *Aurora Leigh* (commonly represented as a sympathetic response to her husband's dramatic disappointments) serves as an excellent summary of many of her literary contemporaries' views on Victorian drama:

> I will write no plays;
> Because the drama, less sublime in this,
> Makes lower appeals, submits more menially,
> Adopts the standard of the public taste
> To chalk its height on . . . .   (V,267-71)

This view of a theatre degraded by popular tastes has prevailed among literary historians to the extent that Victor Emeljanow, in a recent study of popular Victorian theatre, feels constrained to defend himself against "a generalization that permeates the criticism of nineteenth-century drama: that, until at least the 1850s, the drama demonstrates a process of decline and degeneration" (3).

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[3] The Victorian period is saturated with a preoccupation with drama and the theatrical, which Nina Auerbach regards as symptomatic of much wider anxieties about authenticity. Of the literary manifestation of this preoccupation, she writes: "Leaving aside Dickens, . . . William Thackeray, Charlotte and Emily Brontë, Lewis Carroll, Robert Browning, Alfred, Lord Tennyson, Mary Braddon, Henry James, George Eliot--to name only a canonical few--wrote for the theater, longed to write for it, or, failing to achieve theatrical success, transplanted theatrical values into the works that made them famous" (*Private Theatricals* 13). See Martin Meisel for a definitive study of the connections between narrative, pictorial and theatrical forms of representation in the nineteenth century.

[4] Turner 387; Ashley, 14-15, disagrees with Turner's assessment.

The Victorian stage was and is considered by those concerned with literary merit to have been debased to a combination of spectacle and melodrama. A number of factors contributed to these propensities. The huge size of the theatres, which catered to audiences of thousands, meant that the visual generally predominated over the verbal aspects of a play. There was little financial incentive for writers to pursue theatrical avenues, since playwrights were poorly paid and lacked adequate copyright protection. The production of a play also depended to a large extent on its ability to attract an actor-manager by a desirable role. Barrett Browning hopes for the development of a theatre which can transcend such conditions, which

> . . . peradventure may outgrow
> The simulation of the painted scene,
> Boards, actors, prompters, gaslight, and costume,
> And take for a worthier stage the soul itself,
> Its shifting fancies and celestial lights,
> With all its grand orchestral silences
> To keep the pauses of its rhythmic sounds.
> (V.337-43)

Not surprisingly, her description of this mature drama more aptly describes the dramatic monologue than nineteenth-century drama, even after the gradual shift away from spectacle and towards greater realism which began with Tom Robertson in the 1860s.

Both the visual emphasis of Victorian theatre and the later move towards realism boded ill for drama written in verse. While earlier in the century the stage was largely indifferent to verse productions, by the latter period the Victorian theatre was actively hostile to verse drama. William Archer, in his

1881 study of contemporary dramatists, bemoans W.S. Gilbert's propensity for "manufacturing wooden verse" and questions the propriety of verse in theatre:

> But, at best, why choose this hampering medium of expression? Even in the hands of a poet and a master of its mysteries, it is of questionable effect in dramatic work. Shakespeare himself seldom or never wrote a whole play in blank-verse. (163)

There were occasional productions of verse drama in the nineteenth century, but popular plays such as W.G. Wills' Charles the First, Eugene Aram, or Faust, produced in the seventies and eighties, are very much the exception to the rule. Furthermore, even when an actor-manager accepted a play, the author generally lost artistic control and a play was often "revised" to the point of unrecognizability. For the verse dramatist, access to pen and ink, and even publication, was easier than securing the production of a play.

However, despite the paucity of stage productions, Victorian women poets did write drama, in the form of closet drama.[5] Closet drama, either by intention or default, finds its performance in the minds of readers within their "closets" or private rooms. The genre was apparently equally popular with male and female writers, although one could not discern this from scholarly studies of the field. Women writers are not considered to have excelled or even to have demonstrated an interest as a group in this genre with its ambiguities of reception, audience, and intention. Elizabeth Barrett Browning's 1844 A Drama of Exile is in fact the only female-authored work mentioned in a 1990 study of the form (Wang xi). Male-authored closet drama encompasses a wide range of works, from the Romantic dramas of Byron and Shelley and those of the Spasmodic poets, to Clough's Dipsychus, Matthew Arnold's Empedocles on Etna, Browning's Pippa Passes and King Victor and King Charles, Swinburne's Atalanta in Calydon, Tennyson's Becket, and Hardy's The Dynasts. Women poets likewise tended to treat classical and historical material in closet drama which includes Catherine Grace Godwin's "Sappho: A Dramatic Sketch," 1824, Augusta Webster's The Sentence, 1887, about Caligula, and Sarah Flower Adams' Vivia Perpetua, 1841, about an early Christian martyr.

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[5] While "poetic drama" has been used, most recently by Leeming, to designate works written for stage production, "verse drama," as in the studies by Kauvar and Sorenson, Hinchliffe, and Donaghue, seems the preferred term. "Closet drama" has sometimes been taken to refer strictly to works meant by the author to be read rather than performed; however, quite apart from the thorny issues of authorial intention this approach raises,--issues which are very prominent in the case of the female poets discussed here--such a criterion neglects poems such as Shelley's The Cenci or, arguably, dramas, such as those by Christopher Fry, which although clearly intended for production, have become de facto closet dramas.

Such historical and classical subject-matter was a considerable factor in preventing verse drama from reaching the stage. As Leonard Ashley bluntly puts it, "the general public would have no truck with the pseudo-Elizabethan and neo-Greek verse dramas they were offered" (7). Gilbert B. Cross observes that "verse-dramas that gained any success on the stage did so by realizing that the age demanded plays that had a contemporary setting and injected excitement, idealism, humor, and domesticity, into some of the problems encountered by middle- and working-class Londoners" (16). In other words, plays such as Edward Bulwer-Lytton's Richelieu owed their success to melodramatic elements which outweighed their historical subject-matter and blank verse. Even those writing for the Victorian theatre expressed doubts as to the compatibility of stage production and literary value.

The antipathy to such "literary" subject-matter does not explain the absence of female poets from the Victorian stage, however, for, unlike men poets, women poets throughout the nineteenth century took contemporary social situations and issues for their subjects. They frequently focus, moreover, on female protagonists and the position of women. Caroline Bowles' "Pride and Passion," 1822, presents a melodramatic reversal of the narrative of the "fallen" woman, concluding with the suicide of the "fallen" man when his fiancée's belated letter of forgiveness fails to reach him in time. Mary Catherine Hume in Normiton, 1857, dramatizes the search for love made by two "philosophers," male and female, who, unexpectedly, do not marry one another. Margaret Woods' Wild Justice, 1896, set earlier in the century, portrays the confused and ultimately suicidal attempts of a brother and sister to kill their abusive father.

My discussion here focuses on several texts published around the late 1860s: Augusta Webster's A Woman Sold, 1867, treats the topical issue of mercenary marriage; Menella Bute Smedley's "Lady Grace," 1868, portrays a widow's bid for autonomy and influence; and George Eliot's "Armgart," 1871, considers the social position of a female opera singer. The authors use a variety of subtitles for these works, from "A Drama" to "A Dramatic Poem"; I shall use "closet drama" interchangeably with "poetic drama" to designate these texts and to reflect their ambiguous status. The question of their destination and reception is particularly fascinating because it points up how little is known of the conditions of production and consumption of these works, and of their writers' and readers' expectations. Some of this female-authored poetic drama was written with a view to the stage. Augusta Webster's 1882 In a Day, which deals with the position of slaves and women in ancient Greece, received a matinée performance in 1890. Other authors undoubtedly had hopes of production, although Emily Pfeiffer is rare in her frank admission of her disappointment. She prefaces her 1882 collection Under the Aspens: Lyrical and Dramatic, with the following comment on her poetic "Drama of Modern Life":

> "The Wynnes of Wynhavod," the single work which fills the dramatic portion of this volume, was written in the hope that--first attempt as it is at that high prize of a poet's ambition--it might, with the kindly aid of some borrowed technical experience, be found proper for representation on the stage. The first attempt, however, to put this first attempt in the way of benefiting by managerial help, induced an experience of so different a nature, that I was fain to make this earliest example of the treatment to which authors are liable at the hands of managers my last, and to content myself with an appeal to the public on literary ground alone. (vii)[6]

Closet dramas "of modern life" by women represent a departure from the subject matter common to closet dramatists of both sexes; such texts are also notable for the complete absence of any critical consideration. The Princeton Dictionary of Poetry and Poetics considers the nineteenth-century the most productive period for closet drama, on the basis of Shelley, Keats, and Landor, but, like other literary historical accounts of the genre, makes no mention of women poets (Enck). Alan Richardson, in A Mental Theatre, and Gerald Kauvar and Gerald Sorensen, editors of Nineteenth-Century English Verse Drama, give closet drama or mental theatre a largely Romantic legacy, which was supplemented by historical verse drama and a Greek influence on classicists such as Arnold. In their view, Victorian verse drama is found predominantly in the earlier part of the period in the experiments of poets such as Robert Browning and Tennyson, with the dramatic monologue taking up the legacy of the Romantics when the verse drama failed; later in the century, authors such as Hardy, in reaction to the sterility of Victorian drama, began experimenting with the verse drama once again, and the legacy continued into the twentieth century with such notable contributions as T.S. Eliot's.

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[6] George Eliot's Spanish Gypsy presents another example of a verse drama "presumably written to be performed" which became a closet drama (Wiesenfarth xxix). Begun in 1864 as her "first serious attempt at blank verse," she ceased work on it after a few months with the terse note "George has taken my drama away from me" (Diary 6 Sept. 1864, 21 February 1865; A Writer's Notebook xxviii-xxix; emphasis in original). This cryptic assertion leaves the reader to speculate on Lewes' motives or even his manner in doing so. As Gordon Haight remarks, "He had always mistrusted her dramatic powers, and he had to confess that the play was flat and monotonous" (379). Whatever the circumstances of the interruption, when Eliot returned to her drama some time after completing Felix Holt, she decided a "new form" was required, and it became a dramatic poem or closet drama, a form she employed again in "Armgart" (Diary, 15 October 1866, Notebook xxix). Likewise, Daniel Deronda was initially planned as a play as well as a novel (Auerbach, "Secret Performances" 253).

The body of work to which "Armgart," "Lady Grace," and A Woman Sold belong is quite distinct from the efforts of other nineteenth-century closet dramatists in its contemporary setting and treatment of current social issues, most often related to the Woman Question. This dramatic movement in women's poetry also predates the introduction of Ibsen to English audiences in the 1880s, which is commonly considered to have given later Victorian drama a much-needed push towards naturalism and serious social topics. This body of closet drama by women poses a number of questions: why did this form appeal to women poets? why did they choose such distinctive subject matter? why are they not mentioned in literary history? what influence might they have had on later Victorian dramatists such as Shaw, Wilde, and numerous female playwrights who took up drama with socially pressing concerns?

Carolyn Heilbrun contended in Toward a Recognition of Androgyny that "The birth of the woman as Hero occurred, insofar as one may date such an event, in 1880, when almost at the same moment Ibsen and James invented her" (49). The notion of hero(ine)ism implies centrality and independence, in short, the representation of agency and subjectivity.[7] Heilbrun's statement refers to the rise of woman as hero within the literary canon as it was delineated in the early 1970s. However, Aurora Leigh demonstrates that the female hero was in existence by 1856, and the poetic drama discussed here participates in the same literary movement of developing hero(ine)ism. While it is difficult to provide a conclusive assessment of what influence this dramatic tradition in women's poetry may have had on the so-called new theatre by men and women which blossomed in the eighties and nineties, I want to explore the significance of this generic anomaly in the spirit of Gayatri Spivak's insistence on the "provisional and intractable starting points in any investigative effort" (262).[8] It may not be possible fully to explain what factors could have prompted women to choose, presumably to some extent independently, to write poetic dramas of modern life, or what effects this body of writing may have had, but even in the asking one begins to redefine and refine our understanding of the connections between gender and genre in Victorian literature. To begin to explore these questions further, I will consider several female-authored closet dramas.

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[7] For Helibrun the "hero of a work is the protagonist, the central character who undergoes the main action" and is one who begins believing she controls her destiny but moves through suffering to perception of her limitations (91). And although she de-emphasizes the connection between the literary movement she discusses and the emergence of feminism, Heilbrun remarks that in the late nineteenth century "woman's place in the universe provided the proper metaphor for the place of the heroic" by embodying "the peculiar tension that exists between her apparent freedom and her actual relegation to a constrained destiny" (92, 93-94).

[8] Spivak considers this emphasis on the provisionality of knowledge and inquiry among the most significant aspects of Derridean deconstructive practice; while this perspective on intellectual endeavor and the stress on hidden investments and complicities between the subject/knower and the object of knowledge should always be borne in mind, it is particularly pertinent in the context of a discussion of literary histories, and Victorian literary histories in particular, which tend to totalize, exclude and marginalize in order to produce "history."

"Armgart," "Lady Grace," A Woman Sold

A Woman Sold, "Lady Grace," and "Armgart," diverse as they are in their subjects and execution, share some striking points of comparison. A female protagonist firmly occupies center stage in these three works, which all participate to some degree in the exploration of women's ontological status that was the thematic and formal preoccupation of the narrative poetry discussed in Chapter Two. These dramas also, in a manner reminiscent of Aurora Leigh, represent relationships between women as at least as important as heterosexual romance and, more specifically, involve their female protagonists in some form of sacrifice or renunciation for the sake of another woman. Lastly, they share an oblique engagement with the subject of the fallen woman.

George Eliot's "Armgart," overshadowed like the rest of her poetry by her achievements in prose, has recently received attention from feminist critics, who read the poem as Eliot's most sustained treatment of the position of the woman artist. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar relate the protagonist to the paradigm of The Madwoman in the Attic by focusing on the way "her art legitimizes passionate assertion of self that would otherwise be denied her," and view the illness--or rather its cure--which destroys her voice "[a]lmost as a punishment for her audacious commitment to freedom" (453).[9] Others, such as Rebecca A. Pope, reject this latter view since Armgart is left neither dead nor dependent, or even, like Bonnie J. Lisle, consider it a fortunate fall, one that is enabling and humanizing, though painful. The poem's form and its relation to "Armgart"'s thematic preoccupations have received almost no attention.[10]

"Armgart" thematizes issues of voice and gender. It belongs, as Ellen Moers has noted, to the female literary tradition of representing the woman of genius as an opera singer, a prominent Victorian instance of which is the depiction of Vashti in Villette (287 and passim). As Susan J. Leonardi argues, the female opera singer is the woman who for nineteenth and twentieth century writers "has preeminently and indisputably a voice" (66). The diva was such a powerful image largely because, as Armgart tells her suitor Graf Dornberg, the soprano was not only a legitimate role for a woman, but an exclusively female one:

> Men did not say, when I had sung last night,
> "'T was good, nay, wonderful, considering
> She is a woman"--and then turn to add,
> "Tenor or baritone had sung her songs
> Better, of course: she's but a woman spoiled." (96)

That her part could not be performed by a man saves the female singer from what Aurora Leigh calls "the comparative respect / Which means absolute scorn" accorded to women writers (II.235-36). The passage most often quoted as illustrative of the significance of voice in "Armgart," interestingly, is not actually Armgart's voice. Rather, it is that of her cousin Walpurga describing the diva's views of singing as catharsis:

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[9] There are significant parallels here with the illness suffered by Ignatia, for Armgart's physical breakdown also seems to be a by-product of a too-strong ambition, at least in Graf Dornberg's prediction of the illness, when he tells Armgart that ambition "exquisite" as hers "Is not robust enough for this gross world" (97). These breakdowns of the female body, this seeming betrayal of ambitious protagonists by their physical womanhood, seem to me to function as a metonymic short-hand or literary code for the effects of the psychic division which results from internalization of the social censure of female ambition.

[10] Rosemarie Bodenheimer's recent article is a notable exception.

> She often wonders what her life had been
> Without that voice for channel to her soul.
> She says, it must have leaped through all her limbs--
> Made her a Maenad--made her snatch a brand
> And fire some forest, that her rage might mount
> In crashing roaring flames through half a land,
> Leaving her still and patient for a while.
> "Poor wretch!" she says, of any murderess--
> "The world was cruel, and she could not sing:
> I carry my revenges in my throat." (75)

Armgart intimately relates her ability to sing to an ethos of female self-expression and an assumption of murderous rage requiring the safe outlets of her art; in other words, she constructs herself as a Romantic artist-figure.

In the early part of the poem, Armgart uses the vocation, identity, and independence attained through her singing to resist Dornberg's desire to make her his wife. In passages strongly reminiscent of Aurora Leigh's exploration of the conflict between Romantic art and romantic love, she accuses him of desiring her as an appendage, a help-meet whose value would be augmented by her renounced gifts:

> What! leave the opera with my part ill-sung
> While I was warbling in a drawing-room?
> Sing in the chimney-corner to inspire
> My husband reading news? Let the world hear
> My music only in his morning speech
> Less stammering than most honorable men's? (97)

Her argument is that she is "an artist by [her] birth," just as Dornberg is a noble, and that they both "ought to bear the burden of . . . rank," while the Graf argues that "A woman's rank / Lies in the fulness of her womanhood: / Therein alone she is royal" (98, 95). There is the suggestion that Armgart loves him but refuses him out of loyalty to her art, which she knows she would renounce to his "unspoken will" if they married. And her conviction that her charm for him was that she offered "glory possible [to be] absorbed / Into her husband's actual" seems confirmed when he does not renew his suit after her illness (119).

However, the conflict between romantic love and art is not, as Lisle has noted, the only or even the primary conflict in "Armgart." The Graf's role in the poem is quite marginal; he neither returns to provide a marriage ending nor breaks Armgart's heart by his absence. Eliot's text, Kathleen Blake observes, "is quite resolute in supporting Armgart against the threats posed by men and motherhood" ("Armgart" 78). Yet although the poem refuses to valorize heterosexual love over art, a conflict between art and love of a different nature is at the crux of "Armgart." As Blake argues, "the poem identifies the more dangerous result of the division of art and love as the woman artist's contempt for her own sex. This becomes a species of suicidal self-hatred when she suffers the common feminine lot herself" ("Armgart" 80).

Armgart is literally suicidal after she discovers that the cure to her illness has deprived her of her singing voice. She experiences the loss as a destruction of her integrity as an individual, describing herself as

> A self accursed with consciousness of change,
> A mind that lives in naught but members lopped,
> A power turned to pain--as meaningless
> As letters fallen asunder that once made
> A hymn of rapture. (113)

Her language evokes a disintegration of self, a castration, and even a crumbling of language.[11] Her faith in a certain ordering of the world has failed her, leaving her without an identity:

> Oh, I had meaning once
> Like day and sweetest air. What am I now?
> The millionth woman in superfluous herds.
> What should I be, do, think? (113)

Armgart's use of the word "superfluous" places her speech within the debate over the so-called "superfluous" or "redundant" women of Victorian Britain. Such women were generally understood to be unmarried genteel women who, lacking independent means and the education and opportunity to enter middle-class employment, were reduced to poorly-paid and demeaning occupations such as companion or governess. When it becomes clear to Armgart that Dornberg has withdrawn his suit, she invokes the role that faces her with satiric reference to the attention that this aspect of the Woman Question received in the serial fiction of the day:

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[11] The emphasis on the textuality of Armgart's subjectivity is entirely appropriate here, for the rhetorical embodiment of her artistic egoism is the pathetic fallacy. In rejecting Dornberg she tells him:

> Oh, I can live unmated, but not live
> Without the bliss of singing to the world,
> And feeling all my world respond to me. (106)

Such a relationship to the world is rooted in the assumption that she has a privileged relation to nature, as Walpurga points out:

> The wheels might scathe
> A myriad destinies--nay, must perforce;
> But yours they must keep clear of; just for you
> The seething atoms through the firmament
> Must bear a human heart . . . (133)

When Armgart is disabused of such assumptions about the world, her relationship to language is also radically undermined.

Bear witness, I am calm. I read my lot
As soberly as if it were a tale
Writ by a creeping feuilletonist and called
"The Woman's Lot: a Tale of Everyday:"
A middling woman's, to impress the world
With high superfluousness . . . . (124)

Faced with a barrage of such complaints, Armgart's cousin Walpurga, who has always been one of these women, and is physically crippled in contrast to Armgart's artistic maiming, finally confronts Armgart with her hypocrisy and double-standard. In response to Armgart's assertion that the world will now twist her "into pettiness / And basely feigned content, the placid mask / Of women's misery," Walpurga inquires why she only now perceives the mask:

You who every day
These five years saw me limp to wait on you,
And thought the order perfect which gave me,
The girl without pretension to be aught,
A splendid cousin for my happiness:
To watch the night through when her brain was fired
With too much gladness--listen, always listen
To what she felt, who having power had the right
To feel exorbitantly, and submerge
The souls around her . . . . (128-29)

But Walpurga rejects Armgart's understanding of such lives as hers as masks. Rather than a feigned patience, she attributes her care for her cousin to love, and in fact argues that hers is in fact the nobler position:

I accept--
Nay, now would sooner choose it than the wealth
Of natures you call royal, who can live
In mere mock knowledge of their fellows' woe,
Thinking their smiles may heal it. (129)

As a common woman she stands in opposition to the self-privileging role of artist espoused by Armgart, criticizing her not for becoming "unwomaned" but for her arrogance and hypocritical complacency. Walpurga challenges her cousin's discourse of royalty and natural hierarchy in terms which invoke the Chartist struggle for democracy and solidarity:

> Are you no longer chartered, privileged,
> But sunk to simple woman's penury,
> To ruthless Nature's chary average--
> Where is the rebel's right for you alone?
> Noble rebellion lifts a common load;
> But what is he who flings his own load off
> And leaves his fellows toiling? Rebel's right?
> Say rather, the deserter's. (130-31)

The passage recalls the debate between Romney and Aurora over the relative merits of socialism and art, and suggests that Aurora Leigh's indiscriminate dismissal of socialism has its foundation in the poem's allegiance to a conception of the artistic subject similar to, though perhaps less extreme than, Armgart's. Indeed, notwithstanding Eliot's high regard for Aurora Leigh,[12] "Armgart" is in part a response to the ethos of transcendental subjectivity evident in Barrett Browning's poem.

Eliot's poem critiques not only the ideology of women's proper place and role represented by the Graf, but also the Romantic ethos which claims superior rights and status for the artist,[13] and the theory of "Nature" which underwrites both positions. Armgart in her argument with Dornberg rejoices:

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[12] Eliot in reviewing Aurora Leigh wrote that "no [other] poem embraces so wide a range of thought and emotion" and that in it Barrett Browning "exhibits all the peculiar powers without the negations of her sex," pronouncing it her "longest and greatest poem" ("Belles Lettres" 306).

[13] The Spasmodic poets, taking Byron and Goethe for their inspiration, developed this view of the artist (which also inspired Barrett Browning) to its furthest extreme, frequently adopting the form of closet dramas such as Sydney Dobell's Balder. See Mark Weinstein.

Oh, I am happy! the great masters write
For women's voices, and great Music wants me!
I need not crush myself within a mould
Of theory called Nature: I have room
To breathe and grow unstunted. (98)[14]

Yet Armgart's position is not really opposed to theories of Nature, but rather to the Graf's particular theory about the nature of woman as opposed to her own about the nature, duties, and privileges of the artist. They both subscribe to a hierarchical social order which rationalizes their privilege--in the Graf's case as a man, in Armgart's as an artist--and others' subordination in terms of essentialist theory.

The plot of the drama will not permit Armgart to maintain her privileged position in relation to the masses of women. The poem works against her allegiance to the essentialism and hierarchies of Romantic subjectivity, emphasizing the contingency of character and situation.[15] The poem refuses the reader the satisfaction of Aurora Leigh's ending, with its reconciliation of art and heterosexual romance in an integrated and transcendent romantic subject. In Eliot's terms, the woman artist cannot have it all, particularly not when having it all necessitates a disregard for others. Yet the conclusion of "Armgart" is affirmative within these terms, for Armgart chooses independence and a female community over dependence on a man on the one hand or self-destruction on the other. Walpurga helps induce Armgart's change of heart by urging her:

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[14] This passage echoes Eliot's appreciative 1855 essay on Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft, which considers that "some of the best things [Fuller] says are on the folly of absolute definitions of woman's nature and absolute demarcations of woman's mission" and supports the removal of barriers to female education and occupation (Essays 203).

[15] Eliot's "Notes on the Spanish Gypsy and Tragedy in General" link tragedy to the discovery that an individual cannot transcend circumstance, that "the struggle for a great end" may be "rendered vain by the surrounding conditions of life." The example she provides suggests the genesis of Walpurga: "A woman, say, finds herself on the earth with an inherited organization: she may be lame, she may inherit a disease, or what is tantamount to a disease; she may be a negress, or have other marks of race repulsive in the community where she is born, etc. . . . It is almost a mockery to say to such human beings, 'Seek your own happiness'" ("Extracts" 19).

> Now, then, you are lame--
> Maimed, as you said, and levelled with the crowd:
> Call it new birth--birth from that monstrous Self
> Which, smiling down upon a race oppressed,
> Says, "All is good, for I am throned at ease." (133)

Armgart arrives at the difficult realization that her former glory blinded her to the sufferings and renunciations that life exacted from those around her, including her cousin Walpurga and her coach Leo. Her acceptance of that common lot leads her to take up Leo's profession, "humble work," as she calls it, rather than seeking further glory as an actress (139). Her decision to move to Freiburg, which Leo judges "too small," reinforces the sense of a new reciprocal regard for others, as she explains her choice in simple terms:

> Walpurga was born there,
> And loves the place. She quitted it for me
> These five years past. Now I will take her there. (139-40)

Armgart's renunciation is not without regret--she takes up Leo's metaphor of a mother burying her "dead joy," lamenting "Oh, it is hard / To take the little corpse, and lay it low"--but it is convincing (140).

The conclusion of "Armgart" may be less uplifting than Aurora Leigh's, but it is nonetheless compelling. The play dramatizes feminist consciousness and agency as multiple and conflicted. For while Armgart pursues the apex of female public achievement and self-expression, the high position she occupies separates her from other women; her avowed sympathy for the "Maenads" who lack her gift is revealed to have little foundation in an understanding of what it actually means to be a common or superfluous woman. In a pointed reversal, Walpurga speaks out of the position of a relative creature, reduced to serving and living for others, to challenge the limits of Armgart's position. Neither perspective is wholly adequate or "true"; Armgart comes to see the value of service, and combine it with her commitment to art, while Walpurga, who has been serving art while attending Armgart, never denigrates art even as she dismisses Armgart's pretensions to exceptional status. Nor is the resolution really at odds with the positive aspect of Armgart's art. Armgart's masterpiece is Orpheus, a male part; such casting on Eliot's part may suggest Armgart as an androgynous artist-figure, and possibly a refusal to cast her in one of the typical female roles in operatic plots "of women's undoing" which, in Catherine Clement's analysis, "reduce them to nothing." In these plots the conclusion for the woman is overdetermined: "the only course open is death: that is opera's innermost finality" (22). Rather than a typical female part in which a woman is literally done to death, Armgart plays an artist who brings a woman back to life, for in Gluck's version of Orpheus, the poet succeeds in rescuing Eurydice. Gluck's Orpheus is a part which involves art in the service of a woman; Armgart enacts this narrative in her own life when she decides to move to Walpurga's beloved home town.[16]

"Armgart" is also, like several other poetic dramas by Victorian women, an interesting variant of the theme of the fallen woman. While Armgart does not fall sexually, she does experience a dramatic fall.[17] And once she does, her projected escape is the conventional one of the fallen woman: to commit suicide. Like the fallen woman, Armgart finds herself in a social context in which there is no place for her; having rejected the conventional sexual script of marriage, she has no social part to play. The poem's resolution, then, bleak as it may seem, is a rebuke to the idea of the superfluous or fallen woman who has no social value.

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[16] The notion of art dedicated to the service of women recalls Aurora Leigh, in which Aurora's art moves from theory to practice when she takes up Marian's story.

[17] It might at first appear that Armgart's hubris lies in the impersonation of masculine stature and achievement, of the role of artist and public figure. As the drama develops, however, it appears that her failing has rather been simply

The status of the fallen woman is also at issue in Webster's and Smedley's poetic dramas as they also explore the question of women's ontological status. Like "Armgart," A Woman Sold and "Lady Grace" work to deny the notion of female essence or of an opposition between "pure" and "fallen" "natures." Instead, they place female behavior on a continuum within a social context which undermines absolute or categorical judgements.

In "Aylmer's Field," 1864, Tennyson refers to "the woman-markets of the west, / Where our Caucasians let themselves be sold" (348-49; 2: 668). As in "Locksley Hall" or Maud, he is not interested in exploring what, for the woman, underlies the verb "let". Webster is, and A Woman Sold portrays a woman who is persuaded by her family to marry a rich old aristocrat rather than the young struggling lawyer she loves. The drama has two parts, before and after her marriage, which are distinguished by her single and married names, Eleanor Vaughan and Lady Boycott. The first comprises an interview between Eleanor and her young suitor, Lionel, who has just heard of her engagement to Sir Joyce. Lionel's interview with Eleanor provides him and the poem with the opportunity

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ambition over her fellow creatures, belief that she was better, and refusal to accord them equal treatment, regard, and compassion with herself. This reading is supported by the revelation that Armgart's story largely repeats that of her teacher Leo, who also of necessity acquired humility and settled for less than his ambition.

to articulate the critique, evident in the poem's title, of mercenary marriage. He berates her for being "bought like any lower thing / Our Croesus fancies":

> You bought
> For laces, diamonds, a conspicuous seat
> In country ball-rooms, footmen, carriages,
> A house in town and so on--and no doubt
> Most liberal settlements, that is but just.
> A man past youth and practised out of tune
> For loving should not haggle at the price
> When he buys girlhood, blushes, sentiment,
> Grace, innocence, aye even piety
> And taste in decking churches, such fawn eyes
> As yours are, Eleanor, and such a bloom
> Of an unfingered peach just newly ripe.
> Aye, when a modest woman sells herself
> Like an immodest one, she should not find
> A niggard at the cheque book. (2-3)[18]

Such a perspective on marriage is hardly unique for the period. Mercenary marriages, despite the prudent nuptial practices of the middle-classes, ran against the Victorian ideal of companionate marriage and were routinely condemned. Feminists like Webster also, as the following chapter will illustrate in greater detail, considered such marriages of a piece with prostitution as one of many consequences of women's economic disabilities. Florence Nightingale asked in 1852: "The woman who has sold herself for an establishment, in what is she superior to those we may not name?" (412). Feminists did not simply decry the hypocrisy of such "respectable" marriages, but asked where to place the responsibility for such practices in order to prevent them, and concluded that social factors were more to blame than individual women. For example, Armgart complains that if the Virgin Mary came down at Judgement Day, still "Gossips would peep, jog elbows, rate the price / Of such a woman in the social mart" (325). While A Woman Sold upholds the customary Victorian critique of mercenary marriage, it conveys different perspectives on the matter by portraying how a decent woman might be led by social values and parental coercion into making such a decision, and questioning the fairness of judging a person for being compliant when she has not the resources to be self-reliant.

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[18] Augusta Webster, A Woman Sold, in A Woman Sold and Other Poems; all parenthetical page numbers refer to this edition.

The language that Lionel uses in his interview with Eleanor goes some distance towards undermining the distinction he wants to draw between the type of marriage he offers and the one she anticipates with Sir Joyce. He apparently unwittingly employs the same discourse of mercantile transaction he used satirically in the passage quoted above, and his desire for Eleanor seems rooted in a need for ownership. He recalls his first realization that she loved him: "you grew red and trembled, and I knew / In a quick impulse that you were my own" (7). He has not seen her in the three months since that time, since he has been furthering his career in order to attain sufficient wealth, which he calls "My goal for claiming you, the promised prize" (13). He shares in the middle-class Victorian assumptions that marriage must be founded on a certain income, and thus places all marriages on a continuum in which marriage to Sir Joyce is different in degree, not kind, from what he himself offers her. Having grasped Eleanor's hand, he returns it to her saying

> There, take your hand again.
> It is his for the moment. It was mine
> By a less unholy bargain. (8)

Even for him, marriage to Eleanor is a matter of ownership, transfer of property; marriage remains a mercantile transaction, if a sanctified one. This link between the marriage Lionel proposes and the marriage he condemns weakens his argument considerably. That his patterns of thought are conventional rather than unique suggests how Eleanor might have been persuaded in Sir Joyce Boycott's favour, for the bourgeois Victorian ideal of marriage was in part complicit with the mercenary principles it denounced.

Eleanor neither admits to the greed Lionel charges her with, nor denies that she loves him; she simply confesses her weakness in the face of parental pressure. Given that Lionel's habitual epithet for her is "child," this would seem a convincing explanation, but once he has extracted an admission of love from her he refuses to stay to buttress her resolution to marry him after all, for he is "greedy now to heap up gains" (13). Left alone, Eleanor predictably succumbs to pressure and Act II presents her as the widowed Lady Boycott six years later.

Lionel appears no more after the first act; the second consists of a parallel interview between Eleanor and her "sweet secret friend," Mary (16). They exchange confidences. Eleanor shocks her friend with a confession that she never loved Sir Joyce and a description of the tedium of her loveless life. She confesses, without naming him, her passion for her old lover, whom she blames for having trusted her to be strong and not staying near her:

> Strong! I who was to weak to stand
> Against some breaths of anger and the stress
> Of long persuasions and the paltry lure
> Of being the great lady all ablow
> With insolent wealth and fashion. Strong! and I--
> Why did he trust me? He should have staid near,
> If but to look at me the silent look
> That made me feel my purpose confident
> Because he trusted. (28-29)

Mary, for her part, relates that she has been strong enough to renounce her fiancé in order to induce him to marry the mother of his child, and confides that she is now engaged to Lionel Ellerton. Eleanor inquires whether Mary knows the name or fate of Lionel's false lover--she of course does not--and speculates that she may be a spinster, or a mother, "Or dead, more like--one way or other dead" (34). Eleanor follows this up in her final soliloquy before exiting to meet Lionel, when she seems to pull herself up into an assertion of her present self and her support of her friend:

> Lionel,
> I'm coming to you; I, not Eleanor:
> She's gone, she's dead. But, as for Lady Boycott,
> Perhaps you'll like her......she is Mary's friend. (37)

Here her marriage, which has been earlier associated with coercion, sterility, and the husband's "rights" over and ownership of his wife, takes on more positive associations. The play with names evokes the sense of a certain, if limited, fluidity of identity. The speaker can renounce her vestiges of hope for union with Lionel, and insist on the possibility of other positions for herself and other forms of relations with others. While A Woman Sold never affirms Eleanor's "choice," it mitigates the stock condemnation of women who make mercenary marriages. First of all, it contextualizes the apparent freedom to choose within a discourse saturated with mercantile concerns and a society that isolated women within infantalizing family structures. Secondly, it permits its protagonist to assert a fluidity of identity that exceeds such limiting and totalizing social judgements.

In contrast to A Woman Sold, the power of social judgements seems more upheld than subverted in Smedley's "Lady Grace," at least in terms of the effect of lost "reputation" on its protagonist. Lady Grace is a young, beautiful, and wealthy widow whose attempts to act as a free agent are frustrated by gendered social and economic constraints. The larger context of the Woman Question is brought up early in the drama in a scene between two cousins, who are secretly watched by their Aunt Grace. The niece, Rosa Wilmot, is having Captain de Courcy, the nephew, teach her to smoke a cigar. He is taken aback when she declares that men are miserly about sharing their privilege, but he reluctantly admits that he would not teach his wife to smoke:

> Well, I think I would not;
> You see--one's wife--there's all the difference--
> One's wife must never be a theme of talk;
> She must not be a Person, she's a Wife
> (I think the Bible says so): she must stay
> At home while we go out, and be content
> Under all changes, and make no demands. (137)[19]

Comic as this speech is in its reductiveness, de Courcy's unwitting suggestion that for a woman to be a person is to become a "theme of talk" is in part supported by a narrative in which Lady Grace becomes the subject of gossip for believing she can conduct herself and be judged as a person apart from gender conventions. By doing so, she is disqualified from becoming a wife. De Courcy's views do not go unchallenged however, either in narrative terms or in the immediate context in which they are uttered. Rosa interrogates and then parodies them, finally asserting:

> Cousin de Courcy, I must tell you this,
> I never should have guessed from what I see,
> You men were better than we are
> If 'twere not set down as a certain fact
> In sermons and the 'Saturday Review.' (138)

The notion of the "talk" and its influence is expanded by Rosa into an entire discursive system which has the power to define the world in misogynist terms.

Rosa's banter with de Courcy seems to strike a chord with Lady Grace, who remarks "the child has wit" (138). Once Lady Grace has established her intention to treat the cousins as her children, the bond between her and her niece increases as Rosa acts herself but de Courcy is ingratiating and duplicitous. In fact, Lady Grace articulates the obverse of Rosa's critique of masculine privilege when she tells her lawyer Cranston that she is motivated to act as a person or "hero" by the same ideals used by many Victorian feminists to justify their intervention in the public sphere:

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[19] Menella Bute Smedley, "Lady Grace," in Poems, 119-283; all page references will appear parenthetically in the text.

> We women now
> Have all the aspirations and disdain;
> We are told we cannot read our masters' souls,
> And must not know their lives; we must turn away
> Our decent looks, and leave them to their will,
> And to their masks and shifts and meannesses;
> When the need comes, these crawlers shall arise
> And do the work of heroes. (181)

Thus there is a strong identification between aunt and niece, and when Lady Grace discovers that Rosa has rashly gone unchaperoned to visit a man in his rooms, she sneaks in to take Rosa's place, believing that her own reputation is strong. But her good name is destroyed; when she attends a ball the women cut her, and Lord Lynton, to whom she was engaged, considers her claims on him dissolved. Like Armgart, Lady Grace falls from a conviction that she possesses an independent subjectivity to a realization that she is subject to social forces, but this fall in Lady Grace's case is a drop to the level of a truly "common" or "fallen" woman. She asks herself:

> I that was ashamed
> Of a pure thought unsued for,--am I fallen?
> Must I henceforth be hidden, or descend
> To doubtful ways, where charitable souls
> Who will not think the worst may speak of me
> As of marred sunshine, saying it was fair
> Till the clouds blotted it! (256)

Once again, the power of discourse, here gossip rather than the Saturday Review, to define the shape of women's lives, is underscored.

Just as Rose countered de Courcy's assertions about wives, however, "Lady Grace" refuses to conclude with the triumph of a misogynist social text over Lady Grace. She had only engaged herself to Lynton in a moment of self-pity at loving her lawyer Cranston. Cranston returns her love, proves his worth by scorning to believe the rumours, and is accepted by Lady Grace, whose reputation is quickly cleared. Yet though this ending leaves the protagonist happy, it does little to establish Lady Grace as the independent agent she tried to be; it is effected entirely as a result of her renunciation of her wealth and, indeed, of acting independently at all, for Cranston proposes only after learning that she plans to join the Sisters of Mercy. Moreover, the reader's impression of her freedom is modified throughout the drama by the knowledge, which she does not share, that her dead husband continues to influence her fate from the grave: if she remarries, half her fortune goes to her nephew, and the rest to her new husband for his sole use.

Indeed, money in "Lady Grace" becomes an index of assumptions about gender. Lady Grace's dead husband's chauvinism is evident in his desire to in effect bequeath her to another man's control, and his exclusion of Rosa from the division of property; when Lady Grace prepares to retire from the world, she divides her fortune equally between her niece and nephew. The admirable Fitzerse, upon marrying Rosa, immediately makes all his money over to her, and Cranston is so high-minded that he will not avow his love for Lady Grace because it would pauper her and enrich him. The drama's treatment of the Woman Question thus interweaves female autonomy with economic independence. The conservative discourse of sexuality promoted by the Saturday Review is linked to a legal system which, as the foregoing chapter detailed, made wives not persons but chattels, and deprived them of their property. Conversely, the establishment of women as persons and of a different order of relations between the sexes, relies on a reform of married women's property laws as surely as on the articulation of scornful critiques by Rosa or lofty principles by Lady Grace. These crucial connections between subjectivity, economics, and the discourses of sexuality, which are also implicit in the other two closet dramas considered here, will be explored further in the following chapter. For the moment, I shall examine more closely the link between "Armgart," "Lady Grace," and A Woman Sold's engagements with the pressing issues of the Woman Question and the literary form those engagements take.

Telling Differences

What difference does dramatic form make in these representations of women enmeshed in contemporary social issues? First of all, it allows women characters a dramatized, unmediated voice in the text. The importance of the diva as a figure for female achievement and emancipation highlights the significance of this formal feature. Through its use of dramatic form, "Armgart" can both thematize and dramatize female potential and subjectivity in terms of the female voice, in a way that cannot be as readily achieved in the mediated form of narrative. The poem's form achieves greater impact by enacting rather than simply describing the protagonist's voice. Armgart speaks out directly; the poem cannot recreate her singing, but it invokes it metonymically by portraying some of the effects it produces in Armgart's forthright speech, strength of will, and independent, unchaperoned life. And quite aside from the feminist issues the poem explores, in contrast to another Eliot poem, "The Legend of Jubal," with its "remote, mythic" setting and "dispassionate third person narrative," Lisle asserts, "Armgart strikes closer to home emotionally" as a result of its contemporary setting and dramatic form (268).

The contemporary setting of "Armgart" of course places it closer than "Jubal" to Eliot's prose fiction, and it is worthwhile briefly to compare the dramatic and the third-person narrative forms. The presence or absence of a narrative voice is the most significant difference between them. Karen Chase's essay on commentary in the novel helps to elucidate the difference between narrated and dramatic literary forms. In her terms, commentary comprises "all those acts [including the order of narrative events, etc.] which bring a fugitive and unformed experience into a regulative moral order. Commentary, in short, is the text's ideology" (16). The question for a consideration of the differences between narrative and dramatic forms then is what happens when the bulk of commentary is removed, when the order and presentation of events and voices is still there but the overlay of explicit commentary is not? Chase describes the project of drama as in fact fundamentally opposed to that of the traditional novel. In her view, "the multivoicedness of drama is incompatible" with the pursuit of "a secure moral and formal center" (18).[20]

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[20] Chase uses Jane Austen's Mansfield Park, with its internal play, as her illustration, arguing that one explanation for the disproportionate fuss over the house theatricals in Mansfield Park is easily discovered in "a novelist's wariness before a rival genre. . . . The condemnation of domestic theatre stands . . . as the thematic counterpart to the work's great structural ambition, the attempt to develop a novelistic form that would be consistent with the book's moral aims and which would accordingly discard and even discredit the reliance on dramatic devices" (18).

A further aspect of this difference between narrative and dramatic form is suggested by Sir Francis Hastings Doyle's 1844 preface to his poem The Two Destinies:

> [A]lthough the form of this little production is narrative, any interest which it may possess . . . is more akin to the drama. I merely mention this, because there are, or may be, sentiments and phrases in the poem, which having, as it seems to me, a dramatic propriety, I should yet hesitate to put forward as the expression of my own opinions. (vii-viii).

Doyle's poem is an early attempt to write sociological insights about women into poetry; through parallel narratives of two girls, one born rich and the other poor, he implies that circumstance rather than virtue saves some from the plight of "fallen" women. His comment suggests that dramatic form, or even the principle of it, liberates the author somewhat from feeling identified with a text.

Dramatic form seems to free Eliot considerably from the constraints of providing "commentary." While her prose fiction certainly contains feminist critique, it is always modified by a narrative voice that, in Barbara Hardy's words, represents "an attempt to speak carefully and comprehensively not for men or for women, but for human nature" (128). The implications of such a

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Chase's emphasis on multivoicedness in drama recalls Bakhtin's notion of dialogism, which will receive greater attention in Chapter Four. Commentary, in Bakhtin's terms, is diffused by the multiplicity of other voices in the heteroglossic novel; his theory of novelistic discourse assumes that commentary does not stifle the other voices in the text. Bakhtin's comment on closet drama illustrates that commentary can function in other forms than the novel: "The novel, when torn out of authentic linguistic speech diversity, emerges in most cases as a 'closet drama,' with detailed, fully developed and 'artistically worked out' stage directions (it is, of course, bad drama)" (Dialogic Imagination 327). The stage directions in the drama discussed here are minimal.

narrative position and what and how it can speak about women are well-illustrated by Eliot's revision of the "Finale" of Middlemarch. In the first edition of the novel that summarizing chapter commented on Dorothea's life thus:

> They were the mixed results of a young and noble impulse struggling under prosaic conditions. Among the many remarks passed on her mistakes, it was never said in the neighbourhood of Middlemarch that such mistakes could not have happened if the society into which she was born had not smiled on propositions of marriage from a sickly man to a girl less than half his own age--on modes of education which make a woman's knowledge another name for motley ignorance--on rules of conduct which are in flat contradiction with its own loudly-asserted beliefs. While this is the social air in which mortals begin to breathe, there will be collisions such as those in Dorothea's life, where great feelings will often take the aspect of error, and great faith the aspect of illusion.[21]

The passage, Mary Jacobus notes, risks "uncovering fiction as polemic" ("The Difference of View" 18). Reviews objected to it, and Eliot, whose "letters of the period show her desire to avoid polemical statements which could be extracted as messages," revised it (Blake, Love 30). The critique of the social pressure on women to marry and of the inadequacies of female education gives way, in the oft-cited passage, to "the conditions of an imperfect social state," which makes no specific mention of women.

The third-person narrative voice, although not strictly speaking Eliot's own, was often read as such by readers and reviewers; its "authority" is identified much more closely with the author than the voices of individual characters. The novel's voice, typically read as an expression of the moral position of the work, gives way in a dramatic form to a plethora of voices, none of which has any intrinsic or formal authority over the others.[22] In dramatic form the voice of commentary, to adopt Chase's term, all but disappears; the controlling or directing perspective gives way to a series of multiple and developing interpretations. This is not to say that Eliot's novels are not dialogic or subject to multiple interpretations; their internal voices certainly work against closure and monologism. However, in strictly formal terms, the dramatic has this advantage over third person narration, that the direct speech obviates the need for mediating commentary. As Rosemarie Bodenheimer observes, "like the melodrama of the opera, the poem allows George Eliot to dramatize strong versions of single emotions as her prose narratives never do" (24). It is significant that Eliot's most forthright engagement with the Woman Question, a set of issues about which she felt most ambivalent,[23] took the form of drama rather than narration. The dramatic form of "Armgart" means that she need not provide a judicious summary which weighs Armgart's ambitions against

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[21] Middlemarch, ed. Gordon Haight, p. 612, incl. n. 1.

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[22] Dramatic form of course does not prevent critics from seeking to identify authorial position. Mackenzie Bell considers that A Woman Sold and Other Poems, despite the dramatic form of much of Webster's work, reveals "a passionate, almost it might be said, a biassed sympathy with the cause of Woman in her relation to Man" (108).

[23] Eliot wrote in 1869 "I feel too deeply the difficult complications that beset every measure likely to affect the position of women and also I feel too imperfect a sympathy with many women who have put themselves forward in connexion with such measures, to give any practical adhesion to them. There is no subject on which I am more inclined to hold my peace and learn, than on the 'Women Question.' It seems to me to overhang abysses, of which even prostitution is not the worst" (Letters 4:58). For further discussion of Eliot's complex position, see Gillian Beer, "Chapter 1: 'The Woman's Question,'" George Eliot, 1-30.

Walpurga's claims. Although Walpurga articulates the ethics of renunciation and service usually associated with Eliot, the drama is not a monologic articulation of this position. "Armgart" undoubtedly has an investment in its protagonist, not least insofar as she, rather than Walpurga, is the protagonist. Armgart is central because she is exceptional, because she is artistic, Romantic and ambitious.

With regards to the representation of contemporary women, Victorian women's verse drama functions in two apparently contradictory ways. On the one hand, dramatic form presents women as speakers, as actors, as agents, in a way that lyric or third-person narrative poetry cannot. Conversely, the drama portrays the constraints imposed by social context and the way that women's actions are shaped by such forces; women are thus also clearly reactors, social creatures rather than unfettered subjects. These two impulses combine to produce representations of women which embody the contradicted position of women attempting to attain a measure of autonomy within the Victorian sexual system. These works dramatize not only differences within society in the positions of women vis-à-vis men and vis-à-vis each other, but differences within particular women. In effect, these dramas represent middle-class Victorian women as split subjects, divided against themselves in the differences between their self-representations and the actions that are possible to them, and in their conflicting desires.

Armgart's sense of privilege is shattered when it becomes apparent that only her voice stood between her and the common fate of other women; her investment in a discourse of "natural" hierarchies is ironically juxtaposed with her rebellion against the "natural" role of women. But these internal contradictions are not individual, but rather represent internalizations of a society in flux, in which women's "natural" place is the subject of controversy and subject to change. Likewise in "Lady Grace," the protagonist's bid to act independently, indeed to adopt a typically male subject position by becoming the patron of her niece and nephew, and her eventual renunciation of that position, have resonances in a society in which women's relation to property is in transition. Social context and the power of social conventions are of prime importance to all three works, for the female protagonists' actions have significance only within the limited terms allowed them. The recurrent emphasis on money in "Lady Grace" emphasizes the economic base of independent choice and action, and the unmarried Eleanor in the first act of A Woman Sold is represented within a position so dependent that her actions are determined by the pressures applied to her at a particular moment. These three interventions in the Woman Question diverge greatly in their artistic and thematic preoccupations. However, in all three, dramatic form functions to support their attempts both to inscribe women as subjects and actors, and demystify the historical constraints to which they were subject.

Matthew Arnold, a good quarter of a century after publishing Empedocles on Etna, wrote:

> In England we have no modern drama at all. . . . Our vast society is not at present homogeneous enough for this,--not sufficiently united, even any large portion of it, in a common view of life, a common ideal, capable of serving as basis for a modern English drama. (78)

The poets considered here challenge Arnold's assumptions about what drama is and what purposes it serves. The concern with the woman question that Eliot, Smedley, and Webster dramatize involves a recognition that society is composed of women and men with different interests. In this respect, the drama they wrote, notwithstanding its consignment or confinement to the closet, assumed a heterogenous society. Harry Blamires is mistaken in his assertion that George Bernard Shaw's You Never Can Tell was responding to "a pressing new issue, that of Women's Rights and the so-called 'New Woman'" (164; emphasis mine). Neither the issue nor dramatic treatment of it were as novel as such literary history makes them out to be. This tradition of Victorian poetic drama by women is quite distinct from the "mental theatre" of the Romantics and their heirs, with its emphasis on interiority and the drama of the soul rather than "the representation of an object in the external world" (Wang xvii). The writers considered here could not afford the luxurious assumption of a unified self which transcends a largely irrelevant world. Victorian women had to establish identity and to deconstruct it at the same time, for establishing themselves as subjects equal to men meant coming to grips with the socially constructed, and therefore neither unified nor static, nature of identity. The representation of the protagonist acting and reacting in a recognizable, contemporary social setting is thus crucial to their dramatic project.

Terry Otten's assertion regarding the unstaged drama of several male poets of the nineteenth-century applies equally to the poetic drama of Eliot, Smedley, Webster, and other women: "These works pointed drama in a new direction, even though none of them was produced on the contemporary stage or directly influenced the development of drama in that century" (3). Even though their drama was not staged, their representational strategies anticipate those of the Actresses' Franchise League and of the Women's Social and Political Union in the early twentieth century, which devised plays about women's position to bring the issues alive.[24] A number of these closet dramatists were publicly active in the Woman Question: Webster was a prominent advocate of female education, and Mary Hume, the author of Normiton: A Dramatic Poem, reappears in the following chapter as Hume-Rothery, a vocal opponent of the Contagious Diseases Acts. The poet in Emily Pfeiffer's "Drama of Modern Life" espouses the opinion that

> The poetry that moves the world's deep heart
> Must reach its ear as drama. (Under the Aspens 187)

A similar conviction perhaps motivated Pfeiffer, also an outspoken supporter of female education and suffrage, to use her wealth not only to found an orphanage and help educate women, but to found a School of Dramatic Art for women.[25] Poetic drama of modern life by Victorian women seldom saw the stage, and its literary legacy is unknown, yet this unhistoried movement represents a unique and fascinating convergence of female poets exploring available forms and their ability to represent the complex, often conflicting, issues of the Woman Question. Although the specific literary movement was tenuous and short-lived, the impulse towards dramatic form has certainly been validated by ensuing movements within women's writing, from twentieth-century feminist theatre to the propensity of women writers to choose dramatic over third-person narrative voices. The following chapter considers further implications of dramatic form and of a specifically female first person voice in its exploration of the dramatic monologue.

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[24] On the Actresses' Franchise League see Julie Holledge. Holledge reprints some suffrage plays, as does Dale Spender in Votes for Women.

[25] See the short biography in Hickock, Representations, 230, and the entry in Blain et al.

CHAPTER FOUR:

Economical Representations:
Prostitution, Subjectivity, and the Dramatic Monologue

Sexual Economics

> Yet, Jenny, looking long at you
> The woman almost fades from view.
> A cipher of man's changeless sum
> Of lust, past, present, and to come,
> Is left. A riddle that one shrinks
> To challenge from the scornful sphinx.
> ("Jenny" 276-281)

The prostitute may not be the eternal cipher of male lust suggested by the speaker in Dante Gabriel Rossetti's "Jenny," but her spectre haunts the Victorians from the mid-nineteenth century onward. In an age characterized by extraordinary self-consciousness and self-assessment, she became a national obsession and a sign of fundamental cultural contradictions. Nina Auerbach observes that nothing "could exorcise the titanic outcast, doomed and dooming, who seems to have been, like Marley's ghost, an undigested morsel of the Victorian bad conscience, familiar social reality cast into phantasmagoric and avenging shape" (Woman and the Demon 159). "The Great Social Evil" became a national obsession which spawned homes for "fallen" women, dozens of "rescue" societies, hundreds of public debates, thousands of pages in periodicals, books, novels, poems, plays, pamphlets, tracts and sermons, a flood of defeated and enacted Parliamentary bills, and one of the most gender-marked political movements of the century.[1]

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[1] Activists for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts published at least 520 books and pamphlets, a productivity matched by their opponents (Sigsworth and Wyke 77); "17,367 petitions against the Acts bearing 2,606,429 signatures were presented to the House of Commons, while 900 public meetings

As prostitution became one of the most pressing issues in the widespread controversy over female roles and identity, the body of the prostitute became the contested ground of competing discourses of sexuality and social control. This chapter will attempt to decipher, not Jenny, but something of the representational function of such figures within Victorian culture and the complex configuration and contestation of female sexuality and subjectivity which surrounded the "Woman Question." The figure(ing) of the prostitute proves central to the question of female representation, culturally, artistically, and politically, in Victorian England, for "female sexuality," as Mary Poovey argues, "has historically proved to be the most problematic locus of representational issues for women" ("Speaking of the Body" 30).[2]

Prostitution in Britain first became a widespread subject of concern in the 1840s when, whatever the material circumstances, Victorians began to perceive an increase in prostitution and venereal disease (Sigsworth and Wyke 80). Even early in the debate, the traditional moral perspective on prostitution as a sin, committed by individual women as a result of moral laxity, active lust, or greed, was beginning to lose ground to the discourses of the fledgling social sciences. In his influential 1842 study Magdalenism, surgeon William Tait divides his account of the reasons women "commence their career of wickedness," into "Natural Causes" and "Accidental Causes" (45). The former category embraces the five

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had been held by repealers" between 1870 and 1885 (Walkowitz, "We Are Not Beasts" 116).

[2] Poovey elaborates: "it has simultaneously promised the most intimate access any historical woman has to her femaleness and consistently eluded anything like a woman-centered definition because female sexuality has occupied a critical place in men's contests for power and therefore in women's social oppression" ("Speaking of the Body" 30).

categories of licentiousness, irritability, "Pride and Love of Dress," greed, and laziness, while the author lists fifteen "Accidental Causes," in which he includes, with such phenomena as "Theatre going," "Want of proper Surveillance of Servants by their Masters and Mistresses," the causes of "Poverty," "Want of Employment," and the "Inadequate Remuneration for Needle and other kinds of Work in which Females are Employed" (viii-ix). However, although Tait condemns "the avarice of the public" and of employers, which results in such female impoverishment, he devotes the bulk of his concluding chapter on "Remedies for Prostitution" to recommending "Magdalene Asylums" for the reformation of penitent prostitutes and advocating the suppression of public prostitution. In the page and a half he allows to consideration of economic causes, he dismisses the possibility of regulating dress merchants, because it would "infringe fatally on the freedom of trade" and suggests instead that private philanthropic intervention, in the form of the "voluntary benevolence" of privately hiring women to sew, is the only "reasonable" way to address the problem of low wages (280-81).

Tait's study is typical of the confusion of moral and social analysis, or as historian Judith Walkowitz says, the constant shifting "between moralist and environmentalist explanations," that characterized discussions of prostitution into the 1880s. "The Great Social Evil," as the common euphemism had it, was increasingly perceived to be precisely that, a social issue related to the rapid changes consequent on industrialization and rapidly changing employment patterns, market fluctuations, and social conditions (Prostitution 47, 32). Not that the moral emphasis disappeared, as doctor James Miller's 1859 reference to the "multitudinous amazonian army the devil keeps in constant field service" attests, but even evangelists came to rely "on the method and language of social science to lend authority to their arguments."[3] Most of all, *Magdalenism* exemplifies the assumptions and the limitations of the "laissez-faire" attitude to prostitution which guided Victorian approaches to the issue: "Ever conscious of the material precepts of political economy, they tended to look at the question as a market situation in which forces operated on the sides of supply and demand" (Sigsworth and Wyke 80).

Prostitution was not merely a moral and economic problem, however, for the Victorians; in their analysis of the prostitute as carrier of venereal disease, the rising medical profession and the sanitary movement made notions of infection and contagion a central issue. In fact, within Victorian discourse the prostitute becomes synonymous with disease. W. R. Greg, in the *Westminster Review* of 1850, refers to prostitution as a "hideous gangrene of English society" ("Prostitution" 474-75); according to physician William Acton she is "a social pest, carrying contamination and foulness to every quarter to which she has access" (119). Such anxiety over prostitution as agent of social infection was intimately associated with class anxiety, since the prostitute represented a conduit between the upper classes and the dirty, crowded, diseased and immoral working classes. As Lynda Nead argues:

> As street-walker, the common prostitute stood as a figure of contagion, spreading disease through physical contact with clients and on to the "rest" of society. But conceived as a system, there was something more fundamentally threatening about prostitution, something less predictable and more difficult to contain. Prostitution also constituted an *invisible* danger, one which moved *between* classes and conditions and which transgressed social

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[3] James Miller, *Prostitution Considered in Relation to Its Cause and Cure* (Edinburgh, 1859), p. 5, cited in Nead, p. 117; Walkowitz, *Prostitution* 36.

> boundaries even as they were established. In this way the prostitute was the link between slum and suburb, dirt and cleanliness, ignorance and civilization, profligacy and morality; the prostitute made it impossible to keep these categories apart. (120-21)

Poovey has argued persuasively that, as represented by the pens of middle-class Victorian men, prostitution served to elide rather than to accentuate class difference in favour of subsuming and defusing class struggle through sexual difference.[4] Yet at the same time, class difference was clearly inseparable from the issue of prostitution. The most popular narrative of seduction leading to a life on the streets involved a lower-class woman and an irresponsible "gentleman," while sanitary reformers recounted the horrible effects of the introduction of syphilis into the sanctity of the home and the bodies of innocent wives and children. And while Poovey identifies Greg's opposition, in his insistence that sexuality is passive or repressed in all women, to earlier representations of the prostitute as revelling in sensual pleasure, distinctions between "pure" and "fallen" women were still important, even to the more rigorously scientific regulationist Acton. In Prostitution, Acton quotes with approval a Pall Mall Gazette of 1869: "A notion seems to prevail that the loose women of our own day are undistinguishable from the women of virtue. The superstition is preposterous" (214).[5] Thus, although class division may have been of secondary importance to middle-class males in their paramount insistence on sexual difference, the division between "pure" or middle-class and "fallen" or lower-class women operated as powerfully in Victorian writings on prostitution as it did elsewhere. Cora Kaplan asserts that in nineteenth-century literary texts, "the difference between women is at least as important an element as the difference between the sexes." She argues:

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[4] See Poovey's detailed analysis of the prostitute "as she was conceptualized in the 1840s" which emphasizes the way that analyses of prostitution by authors such as Greg defused class divisions by emphasizing sexual difference: "the prostitute epitomized a contradictory representation of woman that was critical to the consolidation of bourgeois power. Middle-class attempts to solve the problem of prostitution . . . were actually attempts symbolically to manage--and displace--other social problems without disrupting either the position of the middle class or the conceptualization of sexual relations upon which this class based its claim to moral and social superiority" ("Speaking of the Body" 30).

> "True womanhood" had to be protected . . . not only from the debased subjectivity and dangerous sexuality of the lower-class prostitute, but from all other similarly inscribed subordinate subjectivities. . . . These fragmented definitions of female subjectivity were not only a mode through which the moral virtue of the ruling class was represented in the sexual character of its women; . . . it led [middle- and upper-class women] towards projecting and displacing on to women of lower social standing and women of colour, as well as on to the "traditionally" corrupt aristocracy, all that was deemed vicious and regressive in women as a sex. ("Pandora's Box" 166, 167)

The representational function of the prostitute in Victorian culture is fraught with contrast and contradiction: both sexed and unsexed, central and marginalized, a displacement of class anxiety and a personification of the dispossessed industrialized lower classes, she is associated with vicious agency and pathetic victimization, economic greed and economic lack. In fact, Daniel A. Harris suggests that she can be no other than the "cipher" that Rossetti's speaker makes of Jenny: "having no valid social existence, [she] need not be represented poetically save as a figure (trope, icon) in the man's imagination" (200).[6] Yet, superficially at least, prostitutes were represented in a large number of poetic and other literary works, and it is to two of these, "Jenny" and Augusta Webster's "A Castaway," that this chapter will turn in its exploration of the figure(ing) of the prostitute.

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[5] Judith Walkowitz traces the erosion of Acton's contention in Prostitution that there was no clear division between "respectable" women and prostitutes. He argued that prostitution was not a permanent vocation that ended in disease and death but a temporary economic strategy commonly resorted to by working-class women faced with inadequate wages or lack of employment, and one which did not preclude their "return" to respectable living, including marriage. Yet in countering the arguments of repealers, Acton seemed to forget his own assertion that "Prostitution is a transitory state, through which an untold number of British women are ever on their passage" (182): "The public should be made fully aware of the fact we are not legislating for 'soiled doves' but for a class of women that we may almost call unsexed" ("Shall the Contagious Diseases Act Be Extended to the Civil Population?" Speech before the Medical Officers of Health [18 December 1869], p. 8; qtd. in Walkowitz, Prostitution 87).

Jenny is undoubtedly the best-known prostitute in Victorian poetry, and Rossetti took more than twenty years to create the poem he reckoned in 1860 "the most serious thing" he had yet written.[7] The thematic focus of the 1848 manuscript version of "Jenny" is evident from its epigraph:

> "What, still here!
> In this enlightened age too, since you have been
> Proved not to exist!"
> Shelley, from Goethe.[8]

The poem deals with Jenny as an anachronistic intrusion into an era of reason and progress:

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[6] I have here, and elsewhere, excised the word "whore" from Harris's text; the locution is never used in "Jenny."

[7] Dante Gabriel Rossetti to William Allingham, 29 November 1860, Letters, i, 384.

[8] Quotation marks in original. The version is printed in full in Paull F. Baum, "The Bancroft Manuscripts of Dante Gabriel Rossetti," Modern Philology, 39 (1941), 47-68; all quotations from the 1848 manuscript version are taken from Baum's transcription, pp. 48-52.

Jenny mine, how dar'st thou be
In the nineteenth century?--
Now when the naked Human Mind
Laughs backward at the years behind . . . . (66-69)

A sign of the hold of "Sense and flesh" on a world that is trying to eradicate them until "perfect Man be mind throughout," Jenny represents a "stumbling-stone of argument" to a man "Who'd write [himself] philosopher" (76-105). She is more than an abstract conundrum within a cerebral system, however, for her physical effect on the speaker is recited at great length:

How is it that in loftiest mood,
If but thine hand or mine intrude,
My being yearns to drink at thine,
Golden goblet of poison-wine,
Trouble of mine, peril of mine?

Peril of mine, trouble of mine,
Thine arms are bare and thy shoulders shine,
And through the kerchief and through the vest
Strikes the white of each breathing breast,
And the down is warm on thy velvet cheek,
And the thigh from thy rich side slopes oblique
(106-116)

The speaker represents Jenny as the sensuality which tempts men to sin, an embodiment of the "Matter [which] clings to him" despite his efforts to transcend the flesh (123). What slight interest the speaker has in her is overwhelmed, as Florence Boos observes, by his "distress at his own intense response to Jenny," a response so ardent he perceives the very air swooning "around and over" her (Rossetti 157; Rossetti l. 121).

Lazy laughing languid Jenny,
Fond of a kiss and fond of a guinea. (1-2)[9]

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[9] Dante Gabriel Rossetti, "Jenny," Poems, 62-73. Parenthetical line numbers within the text refer to this edition.

The published "Jenny" of 1870 retains the opening couplet of the 1848 version, but little else.[10] In the course of its revision, "Jenny" underwent radical alteration. Both versions share the basic tableau of a male thinker[11] contemplating the sleepy or sleeping female prostitute whose head rests upon his knee, but they diverge in their fundamental preoccupations. The earlier draft's governing metaphysic of the opposition between male mind and womanly flesh no longer structures the poem. The speaker of the later version seems so detached from Jenny and so immune to her sensual charms that the reader might wonder, as does the speaker himself, what brought him to her room in the first place. Contemplating her "silk ungirdled and unlac'd / And warm sweets open to the waist," he compares her to an unfinished book (48-49). Now that he is no longer engrossed by his attraction to her, the speaker's self-absorption seems to give way to a greater interest in Jenny: the passing curiosity about her in the manuscript version is developed into a sustained speculation on her ontological status, which involves comparisons between Jenny and his cousin Nell, as well as reflection on his own complicity in "Jenny's case." An instance of the shift away from the earlier simplistic identification of Jenny with sensuality can be seen in the revision of the extended "toad within a stone" metaphor found in both poems. The toad in the 1848 version is Jenny--"So art thou in this world, ma belle" (99)--,while the later version identifies the toad with lust. The plight and social position of the prostitute have usurped the earlier preoccupation with the position of her customer. Moreover, the occasional emphasis on the mercantile aspect of prostitution, evident in the first couplet quoted above, has in the published version been developed into an almost unrelenting insistence on economics, to the extent that critic Daniel Harris considers the problematic intersection of sex and money the central issue of the poem.

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[10] Of the 130 lines of manuscript, only 10 lines were retained unchanged, and only 34 others retained with alteration, in the published poem of 391 lines; see Baum, 48.

[11] As Harris has argued, the 1870 "Jenny" is at least in part an interior monologue rather than a spoken one; however, for the sake of simplicity I shall refer to the poem's protagonist as a "speaker," since his voice is heard in the poem if not in the room in which it is set.

The substantial differences between the two versions of "Jenny" pose the question of why such a fundamental change occurred, between 1848 and 1870, in Rossetti's conception of the poem.[12] And it would be difficult, in spite of the fact that the later poem is indisputably artistically superior to the earlier one, to argue that the poet's aesthetic development alone accounts for the dramatic shift in focus. Rossetti matured as an artist, not in a vacuum, but at a specific historical moment in a particular cultural context. He did so, in fact, in a cultural arena rife with controversy over the status of "fallen" women in general and prostitutes in particular, for "Jenny" was published the year after the campaign against "the single most important legislative intervention addressing sexuality throughout the nineteenth century" exploded into prominence (Mort 68). The Contagious Diseases Acts both grew out of and contributed to the increasing focus in Victorian Britain on prostitution as a serious social problem. Rossetti's early representation of Jenny as an unproblematic sensuous temptation to evil indicates something of the flux in social attitudes towards prostitution which occurred in the years between 1848 and 1870, for "Jenny" as it was published twenty years later is rich with intertextual allusion to the complex debate over prostitution, and Jenny's representational function has become much less simple. In order to trace the significance of these changes, I will first examine more closely the principles implicit in the Contagious Diseases Acts and the terms in which their opponents sought to have them repealed.

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[12] There is some debate over the dates of Rossetti's most intense period of revision. Ronnalie Howard says the poem "may have been begun as early as 1847 and finished toward 1858; it was revised late in 1869 for the 1870 Poems" (100). Florence Boos considers it to have been composed "mostly" from 1858-69 (Rossetti 156). Rossetti was certainly still engaged in substantial revision in 1869 and 1870, as his correspondence with Swinburne over rewriting and omitting passages from the poem reveals. See Rossetti, Letters, 2: 762, 770, 772, 777, 792; and Swinburne, Letters, 2:88, 73. Minor changes were also made in the poem before its republication in 1881.

The Contagious Diseases Acts of 1864, 1866, and 1869 were the result of the new social, economic, and sanitary approaches to prostitution outlined above, as well as a more general proclivity towards intervention in and regulation of the lives of the poor.[13] The 1864 "Act for the Prevention of Contagious Diseases at Certain Naval and Military Stations" applied to eleven military districts in England and Ireland, and the later Acts increased the number and size of these districts.[14] Although the Acts were never extended to "civilian" regions as some supporters wished, those opposed to the legislation were quick to point out that it actually applied entirely to the civilian population, since prostitutes were never officially employed by the military. The first Act allowed for compulsory genital examination of any woman suspected of being a diseased prostitute and provided for her detention in a special "Lock" hospital for up to three months if she was pronounced infected with venereal disease. New clauses in the 1866 Act instituted a "system of periodic fortnightly inspection or examination of all known prostitutes . . . made compulsory, under a well organized system of medical police."[15] The Acts also provided for one to three months imprisonment with or without hard labour, if, after failing to convince a magistrate of her respectability, a woman refused to sign a "voluntary" submission to be examined.

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[13] Walkowitz, Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State, provides an excellent feminist history of the Contagious Diseases Acts and the campaign to repeal them. A full general history of the repeal campaign is Paul McHugh's Prostitution and Victorian Social Reform. Frank Mort, Dangerous Sexualities: Medico-Moral Politics in England Since 1830 provides an analysis of the campaign within the context of sanitary intervention in the nineteenth century.

[14] 27 and 28 Vict., ch. 85; cited in Mort, p. 231.

The Acts marked an unprecedented degree of intervention of the state into the domain of sexuality. In contrast to previous public health legislation, Frank Mort argues, "the acts implicated the state and medical expertise in a much more precise and extensive discourse on sexuality--inciting and crystallizing representations, especially around female sexuality" (73). One of the difficulties of this innovation is evident in the fact that the Acts, which provided for the apprehension of "common prostitutes," neglected to define such terms. The task was left to police and administrators, who adopted such vague criteria as "any woman who goes to places of public resort, and is known to go with different men" or who considered that "It is more a question as to mannerism than anything else."[16]

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[15] "Report of the House of Commons Select Committee to Inquire into the Pathology and Treatment of the Venereal Disease, with a View to Diminish Its Injurious Effects on the Men of the Army and Navy (1864)," P.P., 1867-8 (4031), XXXVII, P. XXIX; qtd. in Walkowitz, Prostitution 78.

[16] William Harris, a Police Commissioner, and supporter of extension of the Contagious Diseases Acts, before the 1868 investigative committee of the House of Lords, qtd. in Acton, p. 153; Mr. Sloggett, Visiting Surgeon to the Devonport Lock Hospital, before the 1869 Select Committee on the Contagious Diseases Act, qtd. in Acton, p. 30.

The Acts actively constructed male as well as female sexuality, for their fundamental assumption was that men must have access to prostitutes. The noted proponent Acton's assertion that "prostitution must always exist" relies not merely on his inference of the consequences "attendant upon civilized, and especially closely-packed, population" but upon a particular representation of masculinity as constituted by a recurrent and uncontrollable, though regrettable, need for sexual release through intercourse (163, 32). This masculinity is of course constructed in opposition to an antithetical femininity, as Greg's well-known exposition of the mid-Victorian sexual economy illustrates: "there is a radical and essential difference between the sexes . . . . In men, in general, the sexual desire is inherent and spontaneous, and belongs to the condition of puberty. In the other sex, the desire is dormant, if not non-existent . . . ("Prostitution" 456-57). This is the discourse of sexuality which underlies the Contagious Diseases Acts; as early as 1863 Harriet Martineau condemned the proposed regulations and urged that legislation treat "men as moral agents and not as animals" (242). Yet the suppositions regarding male and female sexuality prevailed for decades, and the Royal Commission of 1871 repeated them in its "obvious but not less conclusive" pronouncement that "there is no comparison to be made between prostitutes and the men who consort with them. With the one sex the offence is committed as a matter of gain; with the other it is an irregular indulgence of a natural impulse."[17] These and other hegemonic representations of sexuality were challenged in the vigorous campaign for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts.

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[17] "Report of the Royal Commission on the Administrations and Operation of the Contagious Diseases Acts 1866-69 (1871)," P.P., 1871 (C. 408), XIX; qtd. in Walkowitz, Prostitution 71.

There was some slight public and considerable private opposition to the Contagious Diseases Acts before 1869, including a series of editorials by Martineau in the Daily News, the covert influence exercised by Florence Nightingale over Parliament and the military establishment, and efforts of "rescue" societies. By 1869, however, conditions were such that massive opposition seemed to explode suddenly in the public eye, engendering dozens of active repeal organizations with thousands of supporters including evangelists, middle-class men and women, and working-class men. Activists lectured, lobbied, petitioned, campaigned, and generally publicized the conditions created by the Acts. Their energetic efforts quickly stemmed the tide of extentionist support in Parliament, although the existing Acts were not suspended until 1883 and finally repealed in 1886. The remarkable success of the repeal campaign raises a crucial question, one which is well expressed by Mort:

> How did the women and men of the repeal movement contest the discourses of medical expertise and military authority which underpinned the acts? What languages did they draw on to fracture the earlier consensus and what historical forces ennabled them to orchestrate their campaign as a national protest? (86-87)

The repeal campaign helps us to map a shift in discourses of sexuality which occurred in mid-Victorian Britain, and of which the campaign was simultaneously agent and effect. Traces of this shift are already apparent in the contrast between earlier and later versions of "Jenny." "Jenny" and "A Castaway," both published in 1870, provide further evidence of this shift in the continuities between their own representational strategies and the rhetorical practices of repealers.

Advocates of repeal drew on a variety of discourses, including those of militant dissenting religion, civil rights, and anti-statism.[18] My focus will be on engagements with the discourses and representations of sexuality, and on the women rather than the men of the repeal campaign, since their commitment to altering hegemonic discourses of sexuality was more sustained. From the beginning, when the National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts excluded women from its first meeting and the separatist Ladies' National Association was formed, there were significant gender conflicts within the repeal movement. The two associations differed over such matters as philosophical perspectives on the Acts, what remedies should be sought, and the propriety of mixed meetings and public female participation in the campaign. While women tended to define the repeal campaign as a specifically feminist issue, many men emphasized instead the denial of civil liberties entailed by the Acts, the potential insult to or control of their "own" wives and daughters, or the ineffectiveness of such legislation for the suppression of vice or the control of venereal disease.[19] Accordingly, the movement suffered a split over the compromise bill of 1872, which would have repealed the Acts, prohibited solicitation, and only required the examination and possible detainment of women imprisoned for solicitation. The men's National Association supported the bill, while the Ladies' National Association opposed it on the grounds that it maintained the double standard of sexuality and extended police and state power over women (Walkowitz, Prostitution 95-96). When Josephine Butler "was asked to accept the Bill on the grounds that half a loaf is better than none, she replied, 'Not when it is poisoned'" (Boyd 44). The Government eventually withdrew the bill and the struggle for the women's goal of complete repeal continued.

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[18] Despite the religious element of the repeal campaign obvious in Butler's conception of it as a "Crusade," Mort's characterization of "the militant language of radical dissenting religion" as "the only vocabulary" "capable of challenging professional power and expertise" underestimates the extent to which repeal feminist arguments adopted the professional discourse of social economy and applied it to their own advantage (89).

[19] Female repealers shared many of these concerns, as the 1869 letter outlining the Ladies' National Association's reasons for opposing the Acts makes clear (Martineau, 265-67). However, as Sheila Jeffreys observes, nineteenth-century women's fight for the right to control their bodies, and participate in the representation of their sexuality, received little male support and was not (and still is not) recognised as significant because it was not part of the male political agenda in the same way that civil rights or suffrage were (5).

In their attack on the Acts, the middle-class women of the Ladies' National Association contested the sexual discourses of the social sciences largely by appropriating them. The organization of opposition in fact began at the 1869 Social Sciences Congress, where a resolution condemning the legislation was passed with an overwhelming majority. The repeal campaign can thus be understood as a rupture in what Mort calls the "medico-moral consensus over the regulation of sexuality": "in class terms [the campaign] marked a split within the ruling bloc, not the totalizing rupture from without that repealers claimed" (91, 92).[20] Yet despite their opposition to medical control, repeal feminists[21] also rejected older representations of prostitution as a strictly private moral (or immoral) phenomenon. The repeal activists did not so much argue that the issue was not a moral one, as redefine the notion of sexual morality to apply to the public rather than the private sphere. Butler, for example, argued in 1875 that "Injustice is immoral, oppression is immoral, the sacrifice of the weaker to the stronger is immoral, and all these immoralities are embodied in all the systems of legalized prostitution . . ." (Butler in Longford 123). Repealers combined this socialized morality with social scientific analysis, stressing the impact of economics above all. Hence Butler's pronouncement that "prostitution is caused not by female depravity or male licentiousness, but simply by underpaying, undervaluing and overworking women so shamefully that the poorest of them are forced to resort to prostitution to keep body and soul together" (Butler in Longford, 115). This conviction, condensed in Butler's assertion that "Economics lie at the very root of practical morality," prompts Dale Spender to christen Butler's theories of the cause and nature of prostitution "sexual economics."[22]

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[20] Victorian women's opposition to the Contagious Diseases Acts can be read as a sign of dis-ease with the medical profession's consolidation of the cultural power to define and control the female body. See Poovey, Uneven Developments, Chapter Two, 24-50, for a detailed discussion of the "medical treatment of Victorian women." Mort's emphasis on class reminds us that the Ladies' National Association represented middle-class women's representations of the Acts, rather than how they were viewed, understood, and experienced by lower-class women and men, although the Ladies' National Association held large meetings for working women and the Working Men's National League had 50,000 members (Walkowitz, Prostitution 143 ff.; Butler Personal Reminiscences 85).

[21] I am adopting this anachronistic term from Mort, who uses it because "the majority of women repealers clearly identified, if not with feminism, then

Butler thus used the discourse of economics to attack the Contagious Diseases Acts as misguided and pernicious measures. In doing so she was adopting the conceptualization of society as "a laissez-faire system of moral and class relations" popularized by writers on prostitution such as Greg in the 1850's (Poovey, "Speaking of the Body" 34). These tactics had the important effect first of all of sustaining the rebuttal of earlier representations of prostitution as the

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with a body of ideas and aspirations variously known as the woman question, the emancipation of women, the rights of women, and so on" (92).

[22] Butler testifying before the Royal Commission on the Contagious Diseases Acts, 1871; qtd. in Longford 115, Strachey 202, and Spender, Women of Ideas 463.

result of "natural causes" that had been initiated by Tait, Greg and others: Butler wrote to Frederic Harrison in 1868 that prostitution was "not a question of natural vice nearly so much as one of political and social economy."[23] In addition, the approach attacked the Acts in their own terms, since the source of the Acts was economic rather than moral or philanthropic: the instigators were military administrators concerned, not with the sexual conduct of their lower ranks, but the cost of hospitalization and loss of work days resulting from widespread venereal disease within the armed forces.[24] The repealers argued that the Acts dealt with the symptoms rather than the disease of prostitution, while socio-economic reform would eradicate what regulation did not even alleviate.

Butler and other repeal feminists appropriated the economic strand of Victorian analyses of prostitution, developed it into a sustained analysis, and refused to accept the logic of Tait and others that interference in the free market would be "fatal." Their insights remind us of Sheila Rowbotham's observation that "Feminism came, like socialism, out of the tangled, confused response of men and women to capitalism" (Hidden from History 47). In addition to the lack of adequate remuneration in "female" occupations such as sewing, Butler attacked the "trade monopolies among men" that excluded women from more lucrative employment; she attributed moral laxity, frivolity, and love of dress, in other words what would in earlier analyses have been considered "natural" individual propensity to sin, to lack of education, and decried in particular "the absence of any instruction or apprenticeship" as one of the main causes of "the wholesale destruction which goes on from year to year among women" (Women's Work xvi). It is worth noting here that this last representation of prostitution is decidedly middle-class, for, as Victorians such as Acton and recent historians such as Walkowitz have argued, prostitution for many lower-class women was a casual, temporary, and not necessarily stigmatized way to supplement low wages.[25] What is significant here is that repeal feminists' insistence that prostitution was a social rather than a moral issue, and their emphasis on prostitution as the effect of male-authored and controlled social, political, and economic systems, allowed repealers to justify their involvement in what was considered a sphere of moral contagion, and to reverse the terms of the discourse of contagion disseminated by the medical profession. Through their descriptions of the "instrumental rape" of internal examination with a speculum, or accounts of women being infected by examination under the Acts, as well as more traditional narratives of male seduction and betrayal, the repealers "rejected the prevailing social view of 'fallen women' as pollutants of men and depicted them instead as victims of male pollution" (Walkowitz "Male Vice and Female Virtue" 44-45). Repeal feminists thus operated, as they had to, within the discourses of sexuality available to them, but their specific appropriation of and intervention in the more general shift towards a socio-economic discourse of sexuality made it possible to articulate an alternative attitude to prostitution, while, importantly, making that articulation intelligible to their contemporaries and thereby ensuring the widespread support they needed for political success.

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[23] Josephine Butler to Frederic Harrison, 9 May 1868, Fawcett Library, Josephine Butler MS 3020 ; qtd. in McHugh 21.

[24] "At first blush, the economist would be apt to imagine that a very large sum of money is lost to the state annually by the inroads of syphilis" (Bracebridge Hemyng 233; Hemyng goes on to say that the major loss to the state is the loss of time. Acton estimates the expense of venereal patients in the Navy at more than 4000 pounds over 5 years (79).

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[25] At least some of the lower-class women subjected to the Contagious Diseases Acts shared the Ladies' National Association's perception of the Acts as a misogynistic conspiracy by men to control women and the female body. Butler reported one woman's analysis: "'It is men, men, only men, from the first to the last, that we have to do with! To please a man I did wrong at first, then I was flung about from man to man. Men police lay hands on us. By men we are examined, handled, doctored, and messed on with. In the hospital it is a man again who makes prayers and reads the Bible for us. We are had up before magistrates who are men, and we never get out of the hands of men till we die!' And as she spoke I thought, 'And it was a Parliament of men only who made this law which treats you as an outlaw. Men alone met in committee over it. Men alone are the executives.'" (Butler, The Shield 9 [9 May 1870], 79).

"Jenny"

The speaker of "Jenny," as he muses in her lamp-lit London room, indeed seems well removed from the contentious matter of the cultural representation of prostitution, yet the poem was immediately understood as part of the debate:

> Of Jenny it is not easy to speak worthily . . . . It is a monologue; and the case of the courtesan is taken up and analysed, not from the distant stand-point of a parliamentary or scientific debate--not from the half-instructed vantage-ground of a woman's-rights' council--but from the near position which only one who has seen the inside of Jenny's own room could assume. (222223)

Forman's comment indicates the extent to which the poem participates in the discursive shifts and controversies outlined above. Most obviously, it is indebted to the genre of the detached but often prurient portraits of prostitutes which were the part of the "data" of "sociological" studies or discussions, such as Henry Mayhew's London Labour and the London Poor, Tait's Magdalenism, and to a lesser extent Acton's Prostitution. The speaker's description of himself as a bookish man replicates the structure in such works of the middle-class male observer and he seems to be engaged in a similar project: deciphering the prostitute and, inscribing her in language. In fact, Jenny seems more of a social "figure" than some of the case studies whose individual histories or quoted voices appear in Mayhew or Tait, since the speaker knows nothing of her. Instead of representing her history or attitudes, he tries to figure her out of the sundry discourses of sexuality available in mid-Victorian culture.

> Lazy laughing languid Jenny,
> Fond of a kiss and fond of a guinea. (1-2)

Jenny is linked from the outset with a complex discourse of money, commodification and the market. Guineas are associated with kisses and, more importantly, with Jenny, whose hair is gold and whose name sounds like an amalgamation of guinea and Penny. The speaker locates her within an economic system in which people are not easily distinguishable from their monetary value:

> Whose person or whose purse may be
> The lodestar of your reverie? (20-21)

The speaker's own relationship to Jenny is constituted entirely within this structure of economic metonymy. He constantly asserts his purchase of her by calling her "my Jenny" and "Jenny mine," and consummates this relation at the close of the poem when he leaves gold coins in her hair. The poem thus constantly foregrounds the economic relationship between the speaker and Jenny, which, as Daniel Harris points out, is further highlighted by the poem's form as an interior monologue: "The prostitute sleeps; the protagonist keeps silence. Only money links them" (198).

The economic perspective in the poem entails an emphasis on the commodification and objectification of Jenny. When the speaker imagines a "wise unchildish elf" pointing out "what thing you are," he invokes Jenny's status within Victorian culture (77, 79). Her public position as a specifically economic "thing" or commodity is delineated in his description of her trade:

> Jenny, you know the city now.
> A child can tell the tale there, how
> Some things which are not yet enroll'd
> In market-lists are bought and sold
> Even till the early Sunday light,
> When Saturday night is market-night
> Everywhere, be it dry or wet,
> And market-night in the Haymarket.
> Our learned London children know,
> Poor Jenny, all your pride and woe;
> Have seen your lifted silken skirt
> Advertise dainties through the dirt . . . .
> (135-46)

Jenny is an object here. Even as she sells herself, she is robbed of agency: she is "bought and sold" rather than sells herself; her skirts, not Jenny, "advertise dainties."

The exploration and implications of such economic discourse and the relationships it constitutes are of crucial significance in "Jenny."[26] Interwoven with this discursive thread in the poem, however, is a set of other, interconnected discourses of sexuality which the speaker seems to test and then discard as inadequate. For instance, he repeatedly attempts to employ the sentimental equation of women with flowers, first briefly in the poem's first stanza when he represents Jenny as a "Poor flower left torn since yesterday / Until tomorrow leave you bare," and again when he extrapolates on the biblical text:

> Behold the lilies of the field,
> They toil not neither do they spin;
>
> . . . .
>
> What, Jenny, are your lilies dead?
> Aye, and the snow-white leaves are spread
> Like winter on the garden-bed.

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[26] Exemplary explorations of the implications of this aspect of the poem can be found in Daniel A. Harris, "D.G. Rossetti's 'Jenny': Sex, Money, and the Interior Monologue," and Amanda S. Anderson, "D.G. Rossetti's 'Jenny': Agency, Intersubjectivity, and the Prostitute."

> But you had roses left in May,--
> They were not gone too. Jenny, nay,
> But must your roses die, and those
> Their purfled buds that should unclose?
> Even so; the leaves are curled apart,
> Still red as from the broken heart,
> And here's the naked stem of thorns.
> (14-15; 100-101, 111-120)

The language moves through the association of "pure" women with lilies, to the association of romantic and carnal love, as well as female sexuality and genitalia, with roses, to repeat the earlier image of the bare stem of the withered flower. This flowery narrative of the prostitute's brief bloom followed by swift and sure decay is undercut as the poem immediately draws attention to it as a discursive construction: "Nay, nay, mere words. Here nothing warns / As yet of winter" (121-22). A similar treatment is accorded to the traditional representation of the prostitute's eventual fall into poverty and disease, resulting in suicide by drowning in the Thames. The speaker's ruminations on Jenny's market-nights in the Haymarket lead him to imagine that the same "unchildish elf" who has seen the prostitute in her prime has also

> . . . learned your look
> When, wealth and health slipped past, you stare
> Along the streets alone, and there,
> Round the long park, across the bridge,
> The cold lamps at the pavement's edge
> Wind on together and apart,
> A fiery serpent for your heart. (148-54)

Again, the fate of "fallen" women perpetuated in popular Victorian representations ranging from David Copperfield to a host of engravings, meets with an abrupt dismissal: "Let the thoughts pass, an empty cloud!" (155).[27]

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[27] See Linda Nead, Myths of Sexuality, for an analysis of pictorial examples of this narrative.

The speaker's attempts to inscribe Jenny within conventional discourses of sexuality fail; he dismisses them as inaccurate or inadequate representations. He then adopts the medical vocabulary of syphilitic infection in his conjecture about the workings of her mind:

> . . . is there hue or shape defin'd
> In Jenny's desecrated mind,
> Where all contagious currents meet,
> A Lethe of the middle street?
> Nay, it reflects not any face,
> Nor sound is in its sluggish pace,
> But as they coil these eddies clot,
> And night and day remember not. (163-70)

Once again, however, the representation fails to adhere, because it is so incongruent with Jenny's appearance. Far from appearing a mass of disease and mental disorder, she looks like a "pure" woman:

> So young and soft and tired; so fair,
> With chin thus nestled in your hair,
> Mouth quiet, eyelids almost blue
> As if some sky of dreams shone through!
>
> Just as another woman sleeps! (173-77)

Here the gap between signifier and signified, the discourse of contagion and its object, the prostitute, becomes pronounced: the speaker can find no continuity between Jenny and what she is meant to represent culturally. It is enough, the speaker says, "to throw one's thoughts in heaps / Of doubt and horror" (178-79).

The source of the speaker's confusion and horror is that he finds no continuity between Jenny's appearance and what she is meant to represent culturally: he can see nothing that definitively identifies Jenny as a prostitute. This perplexity leads him to consider that there might be no essential difference between "pure" and "impure" women. He cites the simile of the divine "potter's power over the clay":

Of the same lump (it has been said)
For honour and dishonour made,
Two sister vessels. Here is one.
(181, 182-84)

He then considers the other "sister vessel":

My cousin Nell is fond of fun,
And fond of dress, and change, and praise,
So mere a woman in her ways:
And if her sweet eyes rich in youth
Are like her lips that tell the truth,
My cousin Nell is fond of love.
And she's the girl I'm proudest of. (185-91)

This portrait of Nell echoes the opening description of Jenny: both "girls" are characterized by the one rather shallow emotion, fondness. Nell is as fond of love as Jenny is of kisses, her fondness of dress and praise suggests the vanity and love of finery initially associated with Jenny, and, as Amanda Anderson notes, the "pun on change brings this phrase into alignment with its counterpart, 'fond of a guinea'" (112). The speaker's projection of Nell's future, presumably as his wife, suggests that she will be redeemed from Jenny's fate, not by any difference in her own character, but by the consequences of middle-class social status, love and marriage:

The love of change, in cousin Nell,
Shall find the best and hold it dear:
The unconquered mirth turn quieter,
Not through her own, through others' woe:
The conscious pride of beauty glow
Beside another's pride in her,
One little part of all they share.
For Love himself shall ripen these
In a kind soil to just increase
Through years of fertilizing peace. (193-202)

The adjectives "kind" and "just" ironically underscore Nell's arbitrary good fortune. The parallels between Jenny and Nell work in this passage in a doubled way. The changes that the speaker predicts in Nell will presumably undermine her current resemblance to Jenny; however, as Anderson notes, the punning sense of "change" and "dear" reinforce the previous economic resonances and liken marriage to prostitution. Conversely, Jenny's prostitution seems not the result of moral weakness or sinfulness on her part, but the result of arbitrary socio-economic circumstances, shortly referred to as the result of "blindfold fates" (227).

In positing the similarity of upper and lower-class women, in inscribing Nell and Jenny as "Two sister vessels," the speaker approaches the position of the women campaigning against the Contagious Diseases Acts. For many Victorians, the most disturbing aspect of the repeal campaign was that the Ladies' National Association denied the opposition between middle- and lower-class women, ladies and prostitutes. Repeal feminists' emphasis on the social and economic determinants of female sexuality allowed them to articulate a subversive identification with the women subjected to the Contagious Diseases Acts. Mary Hume-Rothery, in an open letter to William Gladstone in 1870 asserted:

> [T]here is not one of us--no, Gentlemen, there is not one of the mothers, wives, sisters, or daughters whom you cherish with proud affection--who dare safely assert that, had she been born in the same unprotected, unfenced position, in the very jaws of poverty and vice, . . . she, too, in the innocent ignorance of her unfledged girlhood, might not have slipped, like them, into that awful gulf from which society at large has long done its best to make escape hopeless . . . . (8)

The association of bourgeois marriage with prostitution was integral to the repeal feminists' critique of the Victorian sexual system. Hume-Rothery hoped for a day "when women shall dare poverty, loneliness, contempt, starvation itself, rather than sell themselves, whether to wealthy husbands, or less eligible purchasers."[28]

"Jenny" makes clear the subversive implications of drawing such a parallel between marriage and prostitution. The speaker's appalled response is: "It makes a goblin of the sun" (206). Such illuminations prove fiendish indeed to a Victorian man's view of the world: the clear categories and distinctions of convention are confused, obliterated, inverted, by the collapse of the opposition between the "pure" and "fallen" woman. The speaker proves unable to sustain this perception. The complete arbitrariness of Jenny's being a prostitute rather than a pure wife leads to the question of the implication of men such as himself on an individual, but also of course on a social, level, in the creation and maintenance of prostitutes. He wonders whether if "Through some one man this life be lost, / Shall soul not somehow pay for soul?" (228-29). Leaving this question unanswered he shifts back into consideration of Jenny as an aesthetic and textual object, now as a figure in a Renaissance painting. This response is, as Robin Sheets observes, typical: "If his speculations about 'man's' responsibility for Jenny's situation bring him too close to the knowledge of his own wrongdoing, he breaks the line of thought, changes the mood, or tangles himself in metaphors" (321).

The metaphors in which the speaker tangles himself are textual: the comparisons to flowers, the vocabulary of disease and contagion, the language of economics, the narrative of the prostitute's short life and miserable death, are all derived from mid-Victorian discourses of sexuality. The speaker's description of Jenny's face, not as a face but as a painting of one, is linked to other indications that he can only perceive Jenny as a representation or assortment of representations. Thus, early in the poem he apostrophizes:

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[28] Hume-Rothery 8. Other Victorian women, from Eliza Lynn Linton and Ann Lamb to Josephine Butler and Barbara Bodichon, made similar observations.

> Why, Jenny, as I watch you there,--
> For all your wealth of loosened hair,
> Your silk ungirdled and unlac'd
> And warm sweets open to the waist,
> All golden in the lamplight's gleam,--
> You know not what a book you seem,
> Half-read by lightning in a dream! (46-52)

He makes the material woman a text and his poem is at once a reading and re-inscription of the text of the prostitute. Likewise, when he contemplates actually communicating with Jenny, and allowing her to respond to his reading of her, he dismisses the idea by representing her mind as an unintelligible book:

> What if to her all this were said?
> Why, as a volume seldom read
> Being opened half-way shuts again,
> So might the pages of her brain
> Be parted at such words, and thence
> Close back upon the dusty sense. (157-62)

A book, by definition, cannot read itself, so the metaphor again makes her the object of the speaker's interpretation. However, he cannot interpret this text directly because he does not have access to it: even though Jenny is represented as passive rather than active, the passage anticipates a rejection with sexual as well as textual overtones. The speaker imagines that any verbal advance he might make to her would result in a refusal of his attempts to read her. "Jenny" thus represents its speaker's project as a paradox: engaged in reading Jenny, he is denied access to her (sexual or textual) self; instead, he is depicted reading her both against and through the various discourses and representations afforded by his culture. It is tempting to attribute his repeated dismissal of his own representations of Jenny to a nascent awareness that his knowledge of her is always mediated.

Regardless of our assessment of the speaker's degree of self-awareness, the reflections that "Jenny" prompts, particularly in the first half of the poem, on its own representational practice in effect deconstruct the textual construction of the prostitute. Various conventional discourses are juxtaposed within the speaker's inscription of Jenny, creating a variety of "Jennies," with the result that none can be seen as [illegible] and authoritative. The implications of this strategy recall Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of "novelistic discourse":

> The novel is the expression of a Galilean perception of language, one that denies the absolutism of a single and unitary language--that is, that refuses to acknowledge its own language as the sole verbal and semantic center of the ideological world. It is a perception that has been made conscious of the vast plenitude of national and, more to the point, social languages--all of which are equally capable of being "languages of truth," but . . . all of which are equally relative, reified and limited, as they are merely the languages of social groups, professions and other cross-sections of everyday life. (Dialogic Imagination 366-67)

Bakhtin's emphasis on the "linguistic homelessness of literary consciousness" within such discourse can be aptly applied to the language of "Jenny," for interpretation of the poem is difficult precisely because it is largely impossible to locate the "literary consciousness" of the speaker, not to mention Rossetti (Dialogic Imagination 367). Nonetheless, despite its continual questioning of the truth-claims of the various social discourses it employs, Rossetti's poem cannot help but perform ideological work in its manipulation of them, for in Bakhtin's analysis, "the living utterance . . . cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue" (276).

"Jenny" engages with the social debate over the representation and significance of prostitution by juxtaposing and decentering available social discourses, and thus drawing attention to the distance between them as signifiers of the signified prostitute. The foregrounding of the gap between signifier and signified which occurs throughout the poem, most noticeably in the passage leading up to the comparison of Jenny and Nell, serves to critique a representational practice which assumes congruence between a social text and the object of description.[29] This aspect of the poem provides a critique of Rossetti's own earlier representational practice.[30] In the manuscript version of "Jenny," the language of female sensuousness and fleshliness is used to identify her with the flesh and the sins of the flesh. She is assumed to correspond to the inscription of her within the speaker's philosophical discourse. Rossetti's 1857 watercolour The Gate of Memory, which depicts a prostitute watching the play of innocent girls while a rat at her feet disappears into a sewer, relies on an established discourse to represent prostitution. "The woman's identity as prostitute," Nead observes, "is constructed by activating the language of city waste, pollution and infection" (129). In "Jenny," as we have seen, the association between prostitution and disease is more problematic.[31]

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[29] Mort notes the metonymy typical of Victorian sanitary logic: "Filthy habits of life were never separated from the moral filthiness for which they were the type and the representative" (39).

[30] Others might read it as a critique of Pre-Raphaelite practice in general. Andrew Belsey and Catherine Belsey argue that "Pre-Raphaelite culture proposed that women were barely subjects. . . . [and in their] painting and poetry entrapped women in a silken web of non-being" (43). Similarly, Griselda Pollock asserts "The dominant tropes of Pre-Raphaelite literature have functioned to secure a regime of sexual difference" (114).

[31] Another Rossetti painting which bears mention in the context of "Jenny" is, of course, Found, the painting of a prostitute recognised and accosted

But "Jenny" actively participates in the social and discursive construction of the prostitute in more complex ways. As already observed, the speaker proves unable to confront the similarity he perceives between Nell and Jenny; in fact, in his need to reconstruct the sexual categories which divide the two women, he conscripts the very discourses of sexuality dismissed earlier as inadequate. Having retrieved Jenny from the unsettling comparison with a pure, upper-class woman, having projected her into the distant frame of a painting by "Raffael's or DaVinci's hand," he again raises the question of responsibility: "What has man done here? How atone, / Great God, for this which man has done?" (237, 241-42). However, apparently unable to imagine how any remedy could come from man, he considers woman as a source of atonement, and immediately dismisses the possibility of understanding between them:

> If but a woman's heart might see
> Such erring heart unerringly
> For once! But that can never be. (250-52)

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by her rustic former lover, which was inspired by "Jenny" (Nochlin 59). Linda Nochlin comments: "his one painting to deal with a contemporary subject in an unaccustomed realistic mode was devoted to the theme [of the "fallen" woman]. This painting, Found, significantly unfinished, occupied him on and off from at least as early as 1853 until the year before his death: it was obviously a work he could never fully resolve or definitely put aside" (Nochlin, 57-58). The parallel periods, in the case of both "Jenny" and Found, of reconsideration and reworking of the representation of a "fallen" woman over a period of years seem significant. It is tempting to speculate on the reasons for the completion of only the former: possibly Rossetti found linguistic, rather than visual, representation a more malleable medium for inscribing a figure fraught with such complex and conflicting associations. Yet Ford Madox Brown's also unfinished painting Take Your Son, Sir!, 1856, which portrays a woman holding out a baby towards a man seen indistinctly in the mirror behind her head, manages to combine imagery of the Virgin Mary, Victorian domesticity, and the cult of motherhood with the startling "challenge to the sexual double standard" implied in the situation and title of the painting, and the monumental size of the woman (Auerbach, Woman and the Demon 162).

The unusual rhyming triplet jars with the rhythm created by the paired or alternating couplets of the rest of the poem, and draws attention to the precipitousness of the speaker's conclusion.[32] The speaker then justifies his declaration through an elaborate and complex metaphor:

> Like a rose shut in a book
> In which pure women may not look,
> For its base pages claim control
> To crush the flower within the soul;
> Where through each dead rose-leaf that clings,
> Pale as transparent psyche-wings,
> To the vile text, are traced such things
> As might make lady's cheek indeed
> More than a living rose to read;
> So nought save foolish foulness may
> Watch with hard eyes the sure decay;
> And so the life-blood of this rose,
> Puddled with shameful knowledge, flows
> Through leaves no chaste hand may unclose:
> . . . .
> Even so unto her sex is she. (253-275)

The metaphor is compounded from the sexual discourse of flowers, the narrative of the prostitute's speedy descent and death, the language of disease and contagion, and of course the discourse of textuality. Yet the latter is employed with a difference: we are not faced with another attempt to "read" Jenny, to capture Jenny in discourse which will be dismissed as "mere words," for within this representation Jenny is this "vile text." Rather than having a body which contrasts and undercuts the vision of her as text, and the (re)presentation of her through social discourses, this text is her body and there is nothing with which to juxtapose it. The identification of Jenny with textuality lingers for the remainder of the poem. Looking at her a moment later the speaker proclaims "[t]he woman almost fades from view. / A cipher . . . is left" (277-80). The last glimpse the reader has of Jenny is reflected in her mirror, which is written over with the names of her male clients:

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[32] Two other triplets occur in the poem, both at the conclusion. The second triplet comprises the speaker's glib joke that his love "rang true" (377-79); the third, in the final three lines of the poem, reinforces the sense of inconclusiveness in a way that a rhyming couplet would not.

> . . . yonder your fair face I see
> Reflected lying on my knee,
> Where teems with first foreshadowings
> Your pier-glass scrawled with diamond rings . . ..
> (319-22)

Like the earlier representation of Jenny as a book which she herself could not read, the inscription of Jenny as a book or contained in a book which cannot be read by pure women, works against the poem's earlier critique of the social discourses of sexuality and reinstates them in the service of re-establishing the opposition between "pure" and "impure" women. Whether read as prescription or description of a social order which forbids women knowledge of sexual women, the rose-in-a-book metaphor reiterates the discursive dichotomy the poem earlier called into question. Unlike the passages discussed above, the discursive framework is here left unchallenged.

The rose-in-a-book passage immediately precedes the speaker's most abstract analysis of prostitution:

> Yet, Jenny, looking long at you,
> The woman almost fades from view.
> A cipher of man's changeless sum
> Of lust, past, present, and to come,
> Is left. A riddle that one shrinks
> To challenge from the scornful sphinx.
>
> Like a toad within a stone
> Seated while Time crumbles on;
> Which sits there since the earth was curs'd
> . . .
> . . . and shall not be driven out
> Till that which shuts him round about

> Break at the very Master's stroke,
> And the dust thereof vanish as smoke,
> And the seed of Man vanish as dust:--
> Even so within this world is Lust. (276-97)

Jenny is again unreadable: a cipher, a riddle. However, this metaphor of abstraction and unintelligibility, in which "the woman almost fades from view," enables the speaker to represent her condition as the result of another abstraction, original sin. He writes Jenny into a philosophical understanding of prostitution as an ineradicable phenomenon, ineradicable because man's lust is constant. That Jenny is a "cipher," rather than simply a symbol or sign, and a "cipher" of a "changeless sum," makes her part of an arithmetic system and evokes the economic perspective on prostitution that pervades the poem. This apparently objective philosophical pronouncement thus implicitly connects to the Victorian laissez-faire economic analysis of prostitution, in which, according to the laws of supply and demand, a market demand creates supply. The prostitute's place within such economic discourse is underscored by the OED's gloss on "cipher" as an "arithmetical symbol or character (o) of no value by itself," or a "person who fills a place, but is of no importance or worth, a nonentity." Figuring Jenny as cipher thus encapsulates the reductiveness of the standard Victorian economic analysis of prostitution: as an individual she does not figure at all. Within the larger system, what she does figure is a zero, itself a figure of a hole, a nothing of use only within a male economy. This reductiveness, however, is essentially similar to the persistant association of Jenny with gold, persons with purses, and human relationships with economic exchange.

This passage's exclusive focus on the demand side of the free-market equation alone seems one-sided but is typical of such analysis.[33] For example, John Chapman, in the Westminster Review in 1869, dismisses schemes for the moral and social reclamation of prostitutes as "delusive," explaining that "the concubinage-market, like other markets, tends to be fed according to demand; and . . . if prostitution is really to be diminished, the principles of those who would diminish it must be preventive." He recommends early marriage as the "only state of things which can be regarded as essentially antagonistic to prostitution" (568-69). In "Jenny," although the speaker perceives, briefly, some slippage between the moral categories dividing Jenny and Nell, he is not able to extend economic analysis to incorporate this perception. This radical insight, for repeal feminists, went hand in hand with an economic analysis of prostitution which emphasized supply as well as demand. They pointed to the over-supply of prostitutes and, unlike writers such as Greg with his reverence for the "natural duties and labours of wives and daughters," namely "spending and husbanding the earnings of men," demanded rectifications of the socio-economic conditions which created so many "redundant" women ("Why Are Women Redundant?" 436). Given that the speaker of "Jenny" perceives that Jenny is not necessarily what she is because of individual moral failings, it is striking that he can find no other explanation for her prostitution other than "blindfold fate" or the "lust" of man.

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[33] Acton does include a cursory consideration of "supply" as well as "demand" in Prostitution (118). The factors he lists, however, differ little from Tait's "Natural" and "Accidental" causes, and Acton presumes the same paramountcy of demand as his earlier colleague.

The toad-within-a-stone passage also, less obviously, implicitly condones the double standard of sexuality and the binary opposition between women, as is illustrated by comparison with William Lecky's famous statement in his History of European Morals:

> That unhappy being whose very name is a shame to speak . . . appears in every age as the perpetual symbol of the degradation and the sinfulness of man. Herself the supreme type of vice, she is ultimately the most efficient guardian of virtue. But for her, the unchallenged purity of countless happy homes would be polluted, and not a few who, in the pride of their untempted chastity, think of her with an indignant shudder, would have known the agony of remorse and despair. On that one degraded and ignoble form are concentrated the passions that might have filled the world with shame. She remains, while creeds and civilisations rise and fall, the eternal priestess of humanity, blasted for the sins of the people. (II, 299-300)

Both passages reveal an underlying assumption of the necessary protection of "pure" women (and thereby of male property distribution) from male lust. This notion is necessarily complicit with the program of supporters of the Contagious Diseases Acts. As Janet Murray observes, "By elevating the prostitute to the status of a martyred savior of the home, men like W. R. Greg and William Lecky were providing an ideological framework for the establishment of a regulated, custodial trade in prostitution" (408).

The speaker of "Jenny" dismisses his meditations on prostitution, as he did the other attempts to capture who Jenny is in discourse, by contrasting it with her physical appearance:

> Come, come, what use in thoughts like this?
> Poor little Jenny, good to kiss,--
> You'd not believe by what strange roads
> Thought travels, when your beauty goads
> A man to-night to think of toads! (298-302)

Yet, as we have seen, despite his dismissal of the metaphor, he cannot really decipher Jenny. Accordingly, as he tries and fails, for the second time in the poem, to animate her--"Jenny, wake up"--he is distracted by the sounds of the market-place:

> And there's an early waggon drawn
> To market, and some sheep that jog
> Bleating before a barking dog;
> And the old streets come peering through . . . .
> (304-307)

The "old streets" recall Jenny's market, Haymarket, and the intrusion of the noise of the morning market, as Anderson argues, "speaks the economic realities underlying [the speaker's] mystified meditations" (116). The economic relation of prostitution, underwritten by the ideological position he has just articulated, remains. Before leaving, he lays gold coins among her "golden hair" (337).

What we have in "Jenny" then is a poem that partakes of the general confusion in the Victorian approach to prostitution as both a socio-economic and a moral issue. Through juxtaposing various discourses with Jenny's appearance and with one another, the poem juxtaposes various social inscriptions of the prostitute, and blurs the distinction between "pure" and "impure" women that underlies those inscriptions. Yet the speaker, at least, does not sustain that perception and quickly reconstructs the dichotomy. Furthermore, the language he uses throughout the poem sustains a reductive economic view of prostitution which assumes it as a sordid but inevitable aspect of the market economy. Why should a poem which begins a promising demystification of conventional Victorian attitudes towards prostitution revert to a virtual affirmation of the status quo? The answer lies in the form of the poem as a dramatic monologue and the subject position of the speaker.

Dramatic Monologue

"Undoubtedly the most significant generic innovation in the poetry of the [nineteenth] century was the dramatic monologue," asserts Bernard Richards (94). Despite consensus on the importance of the form, however, critics disagree in their understanding of its significance and the implications of its development for the history of genre. The dramatic monologue is generally acknowledged to consist of a lengthy speech (or occasionally a meditation) by a single speaker, who may have one or more auditors, the governing principle of which is the gradual revelation of the character of the speaker beyond what she or he consciously reveals.[34] In The Poetry of Experience Robert Langbaum posits the genre as a manifestation of a "relativist ethos predominant in Western culture since the Enlightenment" (109). The dramatic monologue, in his view, allows poets and readers to explore different possible positions, in a world in which there are no absolutes, by creating a tension between a sympathy for the speaker and a detached moral judgement about the "extraordinary point of view" expressed (96). The difficulty with this theory, as A. Dwight Culler has pointed out, is that it emphasizes an ironic structure which does not easily apply to dramatic monologues by poets such as Tennyson or Arnold, but broadly applies to most dramatic poetry (367). More recently, Warwick Slinn has suggested that the disjunction between experience and idea or sympathy and judgement is endemic to the act of entering language at all, since when one enters the realm of social discourse, personal intention or self-knowledge is immediately lost in the multivalency of meaning. Slinn therefore argues for the dramatic monologue not as "repository of character" but as a representation of "experience as the constitution in language of a subject-in-process" ("Monologues as Speech Acts" 1). He elaborates:

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[34] See "Monologue" in the Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, ed. Preminger, 529-30, and "Dramatic Monologue" in Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms, 45-46.

> In reading monologues we are required, I think, to shift our focus, not to read language as an expression of a speaker's character, as a representation of belief, but to follow the processes by which "character" . . . is constituted in language. . . . Experience is not a repository of given information or value structures which explain or give meaning to situations and responses, but is rather the process through which a speaker comes to realize his or her own position as a thinking, conscious subject, constituted through the actions of utterance and through the conventions and structures which allow utterance to occur. ("Monologues as Speech Acts" 8-9)

Recent critics of "Jenny" seem to share Slinn's analysis of the dramatic monologue insofar as they concentrate on the relationship between language and the speaker's ongoing self-representation rather than looking for gradual revelations of the speaker's "character".[35] "Jenny" is not by some definitions, as Harris has observed, a dramatic monologue but rather an internal monologue. I would not, however, concur with Anderson in calling the poem's form "a negation of dramatic monologue." As Anderson correctly observes, the poem "eclipses the possibility for dialogue and conditions the intersubjective encounter" (115); yet these aspects of the poem can be understood as the logical extension of a fundamental impulse of the dramatic monologue--of the exploration of the construction of the subject in language. I would, however, modify Slinn's emphasis in one respect and in a sense revive, though with a difference, Langbaum's emphasis on irony: the subject of "Jenny," like the subjects of many dramatic monologues, does not himself need to become fully aware of his constitution as a subject within language for the drama of the subject's evolving linguistic being to be evident to the reader.

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[35] Anderson, Harris, and Sheets share this perspective to a varying degree.

The title of "Jenny" presents a contrast to the common practice of naming dramatic monologues after their generally male subject-speakers, as in Browning's "Fra Lippo Lippi." The title of Rossetti's poem refers not to an eponymous speaking subject but to the object of the monologue. Indeed, the typical female role in the Victorian dramatic monologue, certainly most canonized ones, is as represented object. The women in "Andrea del Sarto," or "Locksley Hall," are silent objects of the speakers' desire, and the Duchess of Ferrara and Porphyria are dead. U.C. Knoepflmacher takes up this aspect of the dramatic monologue, arguing that, in dramatic monologues such as "My Last Duchess" and "Porphyria's Lover," "Browning parodied his own male desire to flatten women into the 'fixed' and immovable Andromedas of graphic art" ("Projection and the Female Other" 142). "Jenny," which, as contemporary reviewers recognised, is closely modelled on such Browning monologues, enacts a similar project. Jenny too is represented as passive and immobile, and imagined as a both a Renaissance painting and a book. Moreover, the poem provides in the tableau of Jenny another example of the pervasive image of a woman asleep (or dead), which Bram Dijkstra explores in Idols of Perversity. This image, he argues, provided reassuring confirmation of the sexual dualities of male/female, active/passive, dominant/submissive, in the face of less than passive and submissive women outside the realms of painting and poetry (61).

Jenny is a specular object: the object of the speaker's gaze and of his speculations. This aspect of the poem recalls both the Ladies' National Association's focus on the examination by speculum under the Contagious Diseases Acts as dehumanizing to women, and French philosopher Luce Irigaray's descriptions of the specularizing operations of the male subject, who desires to appropriate a (female) Other and in doing so projects "a something to absorb, to take, to see, to possess . . . as well as a patch of ground to stand upon, a mirror to catch his reflection" (Speculum 134; ellipsis in original). The literary subject inscribed in "Jenny" is indisputably male; he is a Romantic subject who constructs his sense of identity in relation to a silent female other, who is denied subjectivity.[36] This structure remains intact even though the poem emphasizes and ironizes the speaker's self-construction at her expense. We might recall here Kaplan's emphasis on the debased subjectivity of lower-class women, in order to note that the effect of the speaker's comparison of Jenny with Nell is to reduce Nell's subjectivity to Jenny's level rather than to elevate Jenny's. Although she's "the girl [he's] proudest of," Nell is, more significantly, "[s]o mere a woman in her ways" (191, 187).

Harris argues that the form of "Jenny" as interior monologue liberates the speaker from a source of censorship, but it also liberates him from having to confront her subjectivity, rather than as a passive, silent, unconscious object which he can read, theorize, and construct. In fact, as Harris says, "the protagonist's dilemma is whether to treat [her] as a human being by addressing her 'aloud'" (200). Her silence allows the speaker to move quickly from knowledge of his own ignorance of Jenny and her world as "[s]omething I do not know again," to projecting her thoughts twenty-five lines later, and intoning, by the end of the poem, "Ah, Jenny, yes, we know your dreams" (42, 361). Figuring Jenny as a book unreadable either by herself or by "pure" women, places the speaker, and men like him, in the only possible position of knowledge regarding Jenny. The speaker thus maintains a monopoly on the production of representations of the prostitute.

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[36] In this respect, the speaker in "Jenny" is like the male subject of romantic poetry and the bildungsroman discussed in Chapter 2.

The emphasis on the speaker's reading and construction of Jenny as a text calls his authoritative and hermeneutic activity into question. The protagonist's failure to speak aloud and address Jenny can be read, as Harris argues, as a "formal means by which to imitate the public's general refusal to acknowledge the problem: the protagonist's silence satirically mimics public hypocrisies" (201). In this way, the poem foregrounds the male control of discourses regarding prostitution: "While the protagonist's capacity to impute attributes to Jenny remains unimpaired, Jenny cannot respond: the inequity, typical of all monologues, particularly suits a poem about the imbalances of sexual power" (Harris 202). Similarly, "Porphyria's Lover" and "My Last Duchess," according to Knoepflmacher,

> feed on the very incompletion they depict. They still render the appropriation of a Female Other who is portrayed as elusive and silent . . . [but] Browning now ironizes the act of projection by which a devouring male ego reduces the Female Other into nothingness. . . . [T]hese monologues thus self-consciously mock the poet's very own enterprise. ("Projection" 142-43)

However, in the case of both Rossetti's and Browning's monologues, they mock the poet's and the speaker's enterprise while reproducing it once again within the artistic process, which means they formally reinforce what they thematically deconstruct.[37] "Jenny"'s harshest contemporary critic, Robert Buchanan, articulated a similar point when he argued that despite the poem's strengths he found it "repelling" because of the speaker's--which he identified with Rossetti's--"fawning over her, with tender compassion in one eye and aesthetic enjoyment in the other!" (47). He suggests a fundamental contradiction between the poem's quite earnest engagement with the prostitute's position within Victorian society on the one hand, and its relegation of her to silent object of the male gaze on the other.

The question of how, finally, to assess the speaker's moral position at the conclusion of the poem is thus a difficult one, for the poem's artistic practice works against its moral insights. The poem demystifies various cultural constructions of the prostitute, and calls into question the division between two categories of women. Ronnalie Howard views the poem as a "moral drama" of development, which culminates in a "moral revolution" in the speaker (111, 110). Other critics conclude that "personal reformation is thwarted by an inveterate sexism" or the limitations of the speaker's analysis (Harris 211, cf. Boos, Rossetti 158). This critical disagreement too reflects a real confusion in the poem, which critiques on a thematic level its own representational practice. The paradox creates a basic uncertainty as to how to read the poem's final lines:

> And must I mock you to the last,
> Ashamed of my own shame,--aghast
> Because some thoughts not born amiss
> Rose at a poor fair face like this?
> Well, of such thoughts so much I know:
> In my life, as in hers, they show,

---

[37] See Susanne Kappeler, The Pornography of Representation, for the argument that such a dynamic is characteristic of literary culture.

> By a far gleam which I may near,
> A dark path I can strive to clear.
>
> Only one kiss. Good-bye, my dear. (380-388)

Is the speaker here self-aware, self-ironizing? Does "mock" refer simply to his bad joke about the sound of the coins he has left in her hair, or does it acknowledge that he has created a "mock" Jenny, a specular object to help sustain his own active subjectivity? How far does his awareness of his complicity in Jenny's case, as both man and speaker, extend? The earnest tone may indicate only superficiality and self-deception, and represent no more than conventional "pieties," according to Boos: "He argues for pity, perhaps, or interest in the prostitute's condition, but never for unjudging neutrality or practical aid" (Rossetti 158). That the speaker's interior monologue contains the potential for a much more profound conclusion than this is indisputable, but the potential is never explicitly developed. Sheets suggests why:

> The narrator occasionally senses that he himself has made Jenny into what she is: in social terms, a prostitute; in verbal terms, the subject of his monologue. But the general inability to name himself as agent reflects profound guilt and confusion, not only about his participation in prostitution but also about his objectification of women in art. (Sheets 332)

Because the speaker never confronts his own part, either personally, socially, or artistically, in "Jenny's case" it is impossible finally to judge in what way he is "ashamed of [his] own shame." But his own subject position, as articulated in and through his dramatic monologue, dictates that in his representation of her, he must indeed "mock" Jenny to the last. This exploration of subjectivity and the representation of the prostitute in the dramatic monologue will now turn to the work of another disciple of Browning and consider her enactment of the identification of a "pure" middle-class woman with a prostitute.

"A Castaway"

Augusta Webster's "A Castaway" presents a striking constrast to "Jenny," as Mackenzie Bell observed at the turn of the century:

> If a fault can be found in the writing of "A Castaway," . . . it is that the delineation of Woman's heart in the most appalling condition of Woman's life is too painful. The theme is the same as that which Dante Rossetti handled in "Jenny," and it is extremely interesting to compare these two poems, one touching the theme from the masculine, the other from the feminine standpoint. (109)

In "Jenny" the speaker finds that "the woman almost fades from view," but in "A Castaway" the woman never fades from view. Rossetti's poem, as we have seem, tends to reduce Jenny: to money, to a cipher, to a silent object. Webster's dramatic monologue, on the other hand, seems to amplify and multiply its speaker, Eulalie, who in the opening passage reflects on a former self:

> Poor little diary, with its simple thoughts,
> its good resolves, its "Studied French an hour,"
> "Read Modern History," "Trimmed up my grey hat,"
> "Darned stockings," "Tatted," "Practised my new song,"
> "Went to the daily service," "Took Bess soup,"
> "Went out to tea." Poor simple diary!
> and did I write it? (35)[38]

"A Castaway" represents a prostitute at the pinnacle of her profession, so successful that she lives in luxury and even sets fashions. The monologue finds her alone in her rooms, looking in her diary, which act provokes lengthy reflection on her selves, past and present. As Eulalie considers various representations of her character in the languages of her society, and regards herself in various mirrors afforded by social attitudes, she develops a scathing critique of Victorian sexual morals and mores. Webster published "A Castaway" in 1870, the same year as "Jenny," and the points of similarity between this and Rossetti's poem are as startling as the contrasts are illuminating.

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[38] Augusta Webster, "A Castaway," in Portraits; all parenthetical page numbers refer to this edition.

Webster's speaker, like Rossetti's, employs the available discourses of sexuality. Even as she cites them, however, she does not leave them unchallenged.[39] She asks herself, "Was I this good girl, / This budding colourless young rose of home?" (35). The flowery euphemism for developing female sexuality is jarred by the substitution of "colourless," with its connotation of insipidity, for the more predictable "snow-white" or "unblemished." The diction points to the materiality of language, since a rose can never be colourless, as well as presenting a contrast to the transparent rose-within-a-book in "Jenny." Similarly, even as she seems to yearn for the conventional comforts and constraints of female married life, her own knowledge of men's "love" intrudes:

> I could have lived by that rule, how content:
> my pleasure to make him some pleasure, pride
> to be as he would have me, duty, care,
> to fit all to his taste, rule my small sphere
> to his intention; then to lean on him,
> be guided, tutored, loved--no not that word,
> that loved which between men and women means
> all selfishness, all putrid talk, all lust,
> all vanity, all idiocy--not loved
> but cared for. I've been loved myself, I think,
> some once or twice since my poor mother died,
> but cared for, never . . . .   (52-53)

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[39] Victorian poetry of course contains numerous challenges to the conventional depiction of the "fallen" woman. Barrett Browning's depiction of Marian has already been considered. See Hickock, Representations of Women, 92-116, for a survey of treatments by other women poets. Thomas Hardy's "The Ruined Maid," 1866, is also pertinent to a discussion of "A Castaway." It ironically counterpoints the social significance of the fashionable appurtenances of the prostitute with the moral stigma that should attach to her as "ruined."

As in "Jenny," conventional values are called into question, but by reference to the prostitute's experience rather than her appearance.

The language of economics pervades "A Castaway," frequently undercutting philosophical and moral abstractions. She ridicules a religious tract she has been sent, which she calls a "pious hash of ohs and ahs, / choice texts and choicer threats," first in terms of its outdated depiction of prostitution:

> Where is it? where's my rich repertory
> of insults biblical? '*I prey on souls*'--
> only my men have oftenest none I think:
> '*I snare the simple ones*'--but in these days
> there seem to be none simple and none snared,
> and most men have their favourite sinnings planned
> to do them civilly and sensibly:
> '*I braid my hair*'--but braids are out of date:
> '*I paint my cheeks*'--I always wear them pale:
> '*I*--' (41, 42; original punctuation)

The interweaving of different discourses in this passage exemplifies Bakhtinian dialogism, as Eulalie's interjections undermine the tract's aspirations to monologism. She dismisses the tract with the observation that she hardly needs to be taught the news

> that those who need not sin have safer souls?
> We know it, but we've bodies to save too;
> and so we earn our living. (42)

She reflects that she should have "had the wit, like some of us, / to sow my wild oats into three per cents" in order to provide herself with a respectable retirement in the future (45). Later, economic reality intrudes to deflate her dreams of leaving her profession and escaping to

> some far nook where none of them would come,
>
> . . .
>
> to blast me with my fashionable shame?
> There I might--oh my castle in the clouds!
> and where's its rent? (45)

In her caustic social and economic analysis, Webster's Eulalie is reminiscent of the articulate and independent prostitutes who occasionally appear in Victorian sociological journalism, such as the female typographer in Mayhew's London Labour and the London Poor, who has sound economic justifications for her work, backed up with the convincing assertion that as a member of the working-class she had little to lose from disregarding middle-class morality. She asserts: "There is very little I don't know, I can tell you. It's what old Robert Owen would call the spread of education" (Hemyng 256). Eulalie's analysis is certainly educated, and at its heart is a project of which Owen would likely have approved: the satiric application of the principles of laissez-faire economics to women, whose lives are their only capital in a thoroughly materialistic world.

> I see clear now and know one has one's life
> in hand at first to spend or spare or give
> like any other coin; spend it or give
> or drop it in the mire, can the world see
> you get your value for it, or bar back
> the hurrying of its marts to grope it up
> and give it back to you for better use?
> And if you spend or give that is your choice;
> and if you let it slip that's your choice too,
> you should have held it firmer. Yours the blame,
> and not another's, not the indifferent world's
> which goes on steadily, statistically,
> and count [sic] by censuses not separate souls--
> and if it somehow needs to its worst use
> so many lives of women, useless else,
> it buys us of ourselves, we could hold back,
> free all of us to starve . . . . (59)

The superimposition of the discourse of economic freedom on the discourse of moral freedom is particularly hollow in the context of Eulalie's history. The account of the asymmetry in her and her brother's upbringing, and the economic conditions she faced as an unsupported middle-class woman, indicate how little economic freedom she possessed and, consequently, how little freedom she had in the "spending" of her life. As she says, "Oh I blame no one--scarcely even myself" (59). The conflation of the issue of moral election with the discourse of economics demystifies the myth of free choice leading to redemption or damnation, reward or punishment, as a cover for a materialistic social order based on the laws of supply and demand. She asserts instead the complicity of the two orders:

> Money's the root of evil do they say?
> money is virtue, strength. . . . (60)

As her monologue progresses, in fact, it seems that Eulalie's problem is not the economic system that has made her a prostitute, but the moral scruples which have made her act against her best economic interests, first in her brief repentance which lost her a particularly lucrative client, and again when she scorned the "hireling's fee" offered to her by the father of her dead child. Her internal conflict stems from the hypocrisy of a world which espouses a discourse of morality while operating on amoral economic principles.

While "Jenny" also explores the application of laissez-faire economic principles to prostitution, the speaker is limited, as noted above, to demand-side analysis. He assumes constant demand and concludes that prostitution will spring eternal in human culture. Webster, like the repealers, reverses this emphasis to examine prostitution from the perspective of supply, and concludes that there will be prostitution as long as, but only as long as, there are economically disadvantaged women. This analysis again undercuts any moral condemnation of Eulalie, who observes that even if she had reformed, because there are "[m]ore sempstresses than shirts," she would simply have displaced another woman into prostitution:

> And after all it would be something hard,
> with the marts for decent women overfull,
> if I could elbow in and snatch a chance
> and oust some good girl so, who then perforce
> must come and snatch her chance among our crowd. (47)

Alluding to the myriad proposals for remedies to prostitution, she offers a modest, economically sound, proposal:

> Well, well, I know the wise ones talk and talk:
> "Here's cause, here's cure:" "No, here it is and here:"
> and find society to blame, or law,
> the Church, the men, the women, too few schools,
> too many schools, too much, too little taught:
> somewhere or somehow someone is to blame:
> but I say all the fault's with God himself
> who puts too many women in the world.
> We ought to die off reasonably and leave
> as many as the men want, none to waste.
> Here's the cause: the woman's superfluity:
> and for the cure, why, if it were the law,
> say, every year, in due percentages,
> balancing them with men as the times need,
> to kill off female infants, 'twould make room;
> and some of us would not have lost too much,
> losing life ere we know what it can mean. (47-48)

This, of course, parodies the economically-minded solutions offered by authors such as Greg, who in 1862 suggested shipping 250,000 "redundant" English women off to the Colonies ("Why are Women Redundant?" 445).[40]

The representation of prostitution as a result of supply, as much as of demand, makes "A Castaway" a much more far-reaching indictment than "Jenny"; specifically, it provides an economic analysis which supports its denial of any essential difference between "pure" and "fallen" women. "A Castaway" attacks this distinction both overtly and covertly. Eulalie condemns the cloistered virtue of women whose conduct has never been tempted by misfortune:

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[40] Eulalie refers to this proposal a page earlier: "Would they try / to ship us to the colonies for wives?" (47).

> How dare they hate us so? what have they done,
> what borne, to prove them other than we are?
> What right have they to scorn us--glass-case saints,
> Dianas under lock and key--what right
> more than the well-fed helpless barn-door fowl
> to scorn the larcenous wild-birds? (40-41)

Eulalie's economic history effectively demolishes the conventional metaphysics of essence by convincing readers that she fell as a result of circumstances rather than natural propensity. In other words, we can believe she was the former, respectable self evoked in the opening. The apparent difference between Eulalie and the unfallen woman is further unsettled by the activities which frame the poem. The passage from her old diary that she reads in the opening suggests middle-class respectability both in the activities described and the activity of keeping a diary. Near the close of the poem, Eulalie hears the doorbell ring, which leads one to anticipate the voyeuristic spectacle of a prostitute receiving a client. Instead, our parting glimpse is of the prostitute engaged in a paradigmatic middle-class female activity, receiving a caller, whom she greets with "Most welcome, dear: one gets so moped alone" (62). The colloquial middle-class diction of "moped" and the typical scene of a woman receiving a woman caller returns us to an ambience that is, to all appearances, one of comfortable respectability.[41] The poem is thus framed by paradigmatic middle-class female activities that predate Eulalie's fall in the opening and follow it in the conclusion. The parallel challenges the conventional assumption of complete opposition, in essence and everyday life, of a "pure" woman to a prostitute.

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[41] Cf. Elizabeth Gaskell's Wives and Daughters: Mrs. Gibson says to Molly, "I've got quite moped and dismal" (ch. 48, 550).

The speaker of "Jenny" maintains the Victorian custom of comparing women only with women, and thus Jenny only with Nell, rather than men. Eulalie, however, does not scruple to wager that if the secrets of "honourable trades" such as law, religion, medicine, journalism, or trade were "brazened out" hers would compare favourably (32).[42] She condemns, moreover, the moral hypocrisy that, unlike herself, whitewashes its sins:

> Oh I'll endorse
> the shamefullest revilings mouthed at me,
> cry, "True! Oh perfect picture! Yes, that's I!"
> and add a telling blackness here and there,
> and then dare swear you, every nine of ten,
> my judges and accusers, I'd not change
> my conscience against yours, you who tread out
> you devil's pilgrimage along the roads
> that take in church and chapel, and arrange
> a roundabout and decent way to hell. (41)

The speaker of "Jenny," as Boos notes, omits any comparison of Jenny with himself, or with "the relative price each will pay for knowledge of the demi-monde" (Rossetti 157). "A Castaway" not only compares Eulalie with respectable women, but with Eulalie's brother, undermining the sexist assumption that women and men essentially differ. Here, the book-learned gentleman has prospered at his sister's expense. For his sake, she has been deprived of education, of marriage prospects, and, in effect, of her future:

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[42] The class connotations of these professions are significant here. Acton, in contrast, compares the prostitute to a fishmonger, who also legally offers a product for sale, and defends regulation by extending the analogy and comparing a diseased woman to a "fishmonger who sells stale fish" to a customer who needs protection by the state from such practices (158).

Did he think
how once I was his sister, prizing him
as sisters do, content to learn for him
the lesson girls with brothers all must learn,
to do without?

. . .

content with stinted fare and shabby clothes
and cloistered silent life to save expense,
teaching myself out of my borrowed books,
while he for some one pastime, (needful true
to keep him of his rank, 'twas not his fault),
spent in a month what could have given me
my teachers for a year. (56)

The frivolous life he led and the money he spent may not only have robbed her of her education. The "pastime" pursuant to "his rank" suggests a university holiday, or a season in London, where 'pastimes' typically included patronizing brothels. His refusal to aid or even see her after her fall is ironically undercut by his own mercenary marriage. Through Eulalie's critical consideration of her brother and her cool-headed recognition that some of the social advantages lavished on him might have saved her, "A Castaway" clearly suggests that male responsibility for prostitution is often more complex than a single act of seduction. In this respect, the poem presents a marked contrast to "Jenny": the speaker of the latter is only able to attach responsibility to Jenny's seducer, and shies away from any consideration of his own complex relation to Jenny.

"A Castaway" points to male complicity in prostitution in a way that "Jenny" cannot because of the radical difference in the subject positions of the speakers. Rather than representing the prostitute as specular object and object of discourse, the prostitute in "A Castaway," as speaker of the monologue, is both subject and object of her discourse. The poem in fact issues a direct challenge to male representations of women such as "Jenny":

> Yes, a new rich dress,
> with lace like this too, that's a soothing balm
> for any fretting woman, cannot fail,
> I've heard men say it . . . and they know so well
> what's in all women's hearts, especially
> women like me. (55)

Eulalie, moreover, provides what Rossetti's speaker both desired and feared: the prostitute's thoughts of her male customers. They are generally dismissive, as in this passage which turns the specular gaze on men:

> And whom do I hurt more than [the men]? as much?
> The wives? Poor fools, what do I take from them
> worth crying for or keeping? If they knew
> what their fine husbands look like seen by eyes
> that may perceive there are more men than one!
> (39)

"A Castaway," however, does not merely invert the structure of "Jenny" to construct Eulalie's subjectivity in relation to an objectified man. She represents herself in relation to herself, past and present, and in relation to a Bakhtinian polyphony of discourses on woman and prostitution. When she wonders what she is, she responds:

> And what is that? My looking-glass
> answers it passably; a woman sure,
> no fiend, no slimy thing out of the pools,
> a woman with a ripe and smiling lip
> that has no venom in its touch I think,
> with a white brow on which there is no brand;
> a woman none dare call not beautiful,
> not womanly in every woman's grace. (36)

This recalls the passage in "Jenny" in which the speaker describes his view of Jenny reflected in her mirror, scratched with the names of clients, which suggests the cultural inscription of Jenny as a prostitute as well as linking the speaker's elaborate inscription of himself with similar efforts by other clients: the prostitute underwrites the inscription of male subjectivity.[43] Eulalie, in contrast, views her reflection without narcissism or voyeurism; she simply contrasts it with the discourses of the Bible, of filth and contagion, and the notion of the "fallen" woman as "unsexed" or "unwomanly." The title of the collection in which "A Castaway" appears is "Portraits," and as dramatic monologues the poems can be read as self-portraits by the speakers, as well as portraits by the author. Because she is the speaker/subject of her monologue, Eulalie cannot be a silent object used to prop up another's assertion of subjectivity. Rather than the objectified Other of a male subject, then, the prostitute in this poem is represented as subject, albeit a problematic, contradicted one.

Insofar as it cannot simply appropriate or reproduce the dominant, gendered modes of representing subjectivity, a dramatic monologue with a female speaker is prey to some of the same difficulties that feminist critics such as Sidonie Smith have identified in the area of women's autobiography: namely, how does woman begin to write herself when she has been the object or ground of representation?

> The generic structures of literature and the languages of self-representation and examination . . . rest on and reinscribe the ideology of gender. But that ideology and the stories perpetuating it have . . . been created from phallocentric discourses written, so to speak, by men who serve themselves, constructing women symbolically as the mirror before which they can see themselves reflected. In fact, 'woman is not just an other in the sense of something beyond [man's] ken, but an other intimately related to

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[43] See Helena Michie: "Rossetti's 'Jenny' . . . is reduced first to textuality and then to a mirror upon which her clients carve their names with diamond rings." Michie is comparing Jenny to Dorothea, in Middlemarch, who, she argues, "by becoming Will's 'poem', becomes an inscription of his will, a text of his own making. Will's identification as a writer allows him hermeneutic control over Dorothea; his marriage to a poem gives him the privilege of interpretation" (109).

> him as the image of what he is not, and therefore as an essential reminder of what he is.' (Smith 48; Eagleton 132)

Eulalie has no recourse to an "essential reminder of what [s]he is." As a dramatic monologue without a specularized Other, "A Castaway" inscribes the subject as flexible and socially constituted; such a notion of subjectivity contradicts an attempt to write woman as "essentially" feminine, domestic, or in any way "fixed." Eulalie is a split subject who experiences the alienating indeterminacy of language as internal rupture. An example is her extended interrogation of the word "modest,"--which begins with a scene remarkably similar to Christina Rossetti's "In An Artist's Studio"[44]--as she contemplates her beauty in the mirror:

> Aye let me feed upon my beauty thus,
> be glad in it like painters when they see
> at last the face they dreamed but could not find
> look from their canvass [sic] on them, triumph in it,
> the dearest thing I have. Why, 'tis my all,
> let me make much of it: is it not this,
> this beauty, my own curse at once and tool
> to snare men's souls--(I know what the good say
> of beauty in such creatures)--is is [sic] not this
> that makes me feel myself a woman still,
> some little pride, some little--
>
> Here's a jest!
> what word will fit the sense but modesty?
> A wanton I but modest! (37)

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[44] "In An Artist's Studio" was written in 1856, but published posthumously. The final lines of the poem read:

> He feeds upon her face by day and night,
> And she with true kind eyes looks back on him,
> Fair as the moon and joyful as the light:
> Not wan with waiting, not with sorrow dim;
> Not as she is, but was when hope shone bright;
> Not as she is, but as she fills his dream.
> (9-14; Poetical Works 330)

Eulalie's problem here is the multivalency of the word. In a public, or social, sense, she is anything but "modest." She is, in fact, a "wanton" and it is a role she does not deny, scorning to consider herself a "fractious angel misconceived" (38). But she is divided by the opposite meanings inhering in the same word insofar as she experiences the feelings of a modest woman. She is further fractured by language in the recognition that she is publicly modest in behaviour and appearance:

> Modest, true;
> I'm not drunk in the streets, ply not for hire
> at infamous corners with my likenesses
> of the humbler kind; yes, modesty's my word--
> 'twould shape my mouth well too, I think I'll try:
> "Sir, Mr What-you-will, Lord Who-knows-what,
> my present lover or my next to come,
> value me at my worth, fill your purse full,
> for I am modest; yes, and honour me
> as though your schoolgirl sister or your wife
> could let her skirts brush mine or talk of me;
> for I am modest. (37-38)

The categories are reversed: publicly she is indistinguishable in demeanour from respectable women, and is paid well for such behaviour; but it is a masquerade, a shape she assumes, in contrast to her "actual" immodesty. In exasperation, torn between these conflicting valences of modesty, she calls herself a hypocrite, but the contradictions she experiences arise as much from language as from her conduct.

Much of "A Castaway" concerns itself with interrogating the gap between Eulalie's past and present self presented at the opening of the poem:

> So long since:
> and now it seems a jest to talk of me
> as if I could be one with her, of me
> who am......me. (36)

She later wonders, "And could I fit me to my former self?" (44). As already observed, this apparent disjunction is the function of multivalent discourses of sexuality, rather than the result of a metaphysics of essence, and the gap in the poem between "pure" and "impure" female selves translates in Victorian cultural terms into the division between classes. That Eulalie contains this class split within her subject position unsettles the opposition even as it inscribes it, and, as we shall see, the poem also undermines such distinctions formally. This representation of multiple subjectivity in "A Castaway" operates with the same flexible spirit that enabled middle-class women repealers to identify with prostitutes even though they abhorred prostitution: "They acknowledged the multiple social identities of poor women: of prostitutes who were not irrevocably 'fallen' and of brothel keepers who were in reality female lodging-house keepers struggling to support their families" (Walkowitz, Prostitution 147).

Eulalie thus inscribes herself as a multiple, contradicted subject-in-process, formed in the tension between herself as represented object of her utterance and herself as speaking subject. "A Castaway" thus challenges the silencing and objectification of women within representations of male subjectivity. Moreover, representing subjectivity through a woman speaker further denies essentialist or reductive representations of women, because it denies the notion of the subject as inherently male which elides women as subjects: part of the dynamic of reading a dramatic monologue is that one is thereby identified with the speaker and reads the "I" as if one thinks or speaks it.

"A Castaway" is by no means the first instance of a female-authored dramatic monologue with a female speaker.[45] Webster's formal strategy grows out of a female tradition which began in nineteenth-century women's poetry with the dramatic lyrics of Felicia Hemans and Letitia Landon. Barrett Browning experimented with the first-person female voice in early monologues such as "Bertha in the Lane," then later in Sonnets from the Portuguese and Aurora Leigh.[46] In her 1850 dramatic monologue "Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point," she enacted a representational strategy which anticipates Webster's "A Castaway."[47] Merging her poetic voice with that of a female slave, Barrett Browning at once expresses solidarity with a silenced minority, represents a culturally debased subjectivity as intelligent and active, and creates a fierce indictment of American values. Hélène Cixous emphasizes the role that such adoption of the cause of silent or silenced women can play in the move towards affirming female subjectivity in language:

> It is in writing, from woman and toward woman, and accepting the challenge of the discourse controlled by the phallus, that woman will affirm woman somewhere other than in silence, the place

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[45] As Knoepflmacher observes, male poets also gave women voices in dramatic monologues, with considerable success: "Unlike the Duchess and Porphyria, Browning's later women are allowed to speak: of these, Pompilia, a full-blown version of the earthly Madonna, modelled . . . after Barrett's Marian Erle (and Barrett herself), certainly remains the most notable" ("Projection" 155).

[46] See Mermin, "The Female Poet and the Embarrassed Reader" for a keen analysis of the sexual politics of representation in Sonnets. Leighton observes that in the poem's treatment of Marian Erle "Aurora Leigh asserts an identity of social and aesthetic purpose against the laws of difference between women" ("Because Men Made the Laws" 114).

[47] My analysis of this strategy is indebted to Leighton's discussion, in "Because Men Made the Laws," of the implications of female poets' use of the first person female voice.

> reserved for her in and through the Symbolic. (Cixous, Newly Born Woman 93).

Webster's portrayal of Eulalie may be neither accurate nor typical as an historical depiction of successful Victorian prostitutes. The significance of "A Castaway" lies in its artistic enactment of the growing identification during the 1860s of middle-class women with prostitutes in particular and "fallen" women in general. Within female literary history, Eulalie is a legacy and development from Aurora Leigh's Marian Erle, who was portrayed a victim, as Angela Leighton argues, "not to indulge the squeamishness of the reader, but to deflect moral judgement from the personal to the social" ("Because Men Made the Laws" 111). "A Castaway" is able to emphasize social culpability and still endow its speaker with agency.

Poovey has explored representations of Victorian female subjectivity within a slightly earlier context. She focuses on Jane Eyre's depiction of active female sexuality crossing class lines as an intervention by a female Other which capitalizes on the contradictory terms of the debate over sexuality set by Greg and others. Although "A Castaway" elides any reference to active sexuality, and conforms rather to Butler's, and Greg's, notion of women's sexuality as absent or passive, Poovey's argument is significant nonetheless.[48] Namely, the crucial importance of gender ideology to the constitution of female identity meant that "for a woman to express or represent 'herself,' she had to foreground, and work through, the dominant representation of gender," and that, as a result of her position in the social formation, class issues were much less problematic than they were for men ("Speaking the Body" 43). Thus, although they take different approaches to female sexuality, Brontë and Webster both work to inscribe female subjectivity through a process of female identification that transgresses class barriers.

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[48] Many historians, such as Mort, Walkowitz, and Nead, have noted that nineteenth-century "[f]eminist debates over prostitution contained no positive representations of active female sexuality, either for prostitutes or for women in general" (Mort 98; see also Nead 22). The same is true of both Rossetti and Webster, yet Webster still manages to provide a more convincing and challenging representation of the prostitute as subject rather than as an object of male lust or cipher thereof, and to that extent went beyond both repeal feminism and Rossetti.

The structure of "A Castaway" refuses the opposition between the middle-class Victorian "lady" and the prostitute, and enacts the very gesture which Eulalie conceives might have saved her:

> I think indeed
> if some kind hand, a woman's--I hate men--
> had stretched itself to help me to firm ground,
> taken a chance and risked my falling back,
> I could have gone my way not falling back:
> but, let her be all brave, all charitable,
> how could she do it? Such a trifling boon,
> a little work to live by, 'tis not much,
> and I might have found will enough to last:
> but where's the work? (46-47)

In a world in which she had little power directly to eradicate the economic causes of prostitution, Webster intervenes on the cultural level to represent and demystify those causes. Her most powerful and subversive strategy is to merge her poetic voice with the prostitute's first-person speech. As noted above, Eulalie's reflections center on her attempt to bridge her past and present selves. In recollecting her former "pure" self she says:

> . . . it seems a jest to talk of me
> as if I could be one with her, of me
> who am......me. (36; original punctuation)

In this passage, as Leighton argues, "the dramatic monologue asserts its single voice," which combines the voice of the poet with that of the prostitute, against the moral law separating "pure" and "impure" women:

> The pronoun doubles poet and outcast, speaker and actor, in a drama which is transgressively sistering from the start. The voice of the poem is both act and consciousness, both object and subject, both "me" and "me." The gender-specific nature of this poet's voice makes a common cause of the fact of womanhood. ("Because Men Made the Laws" 123)

In giving her voice to the prostitute's cause, Webster promotes aesthetically what she desires politically.

The larger political implications of Webster's artistic practice are apparent in its similarity to the strategy of the repeal feminists who also self-consciously identified themselves with prostitutes. Webster was deeply involved in campaigns for female suffrage and female education; it is thus unsurprising that the approach to prostitution in "A Castaway" should resemble that of repeal feminists.[49] However, Webster goes further than even sympathetic reformers such as Butler, insofar as she inscribes Eulalie not merely as a victim,[50] but also as an agent and speaking subject. Eulalie embodies the contradictions of Victorian feminists, who in demanding independence and agency found themselves insisting on the economic and social determinacy of their lives.

The Contagious Diseases Acts involved the convergence of the effects of women's lack of political representation with their exclusion from cultural representations. The Acts were based, according to feminist repealers, on a misrepresentation of the nature and causes of prostitution. Under the Acts, if a woman appeared to authorities as a prostitute, she was treated as one. Since to many authorities it was "more a question as to mannerism than anything else," the perils of male control of representations of women became evident (Acton 30). In addition, repeal feminists came to feel that the Acts were the result of an exclusively male Parliamentary system. Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy asserted in a letter to the Times that the Contagious Diseases Acts "could never have been proposed to, much less sanctioned by, a Parliament in which women were represented; . . . it seems hopeless to expect that this wrong will be set right until women themselves can directly influence legislation" (406). The growing awareness of women's lack of political representation thus dovetailed with a powerful illustration of the need for cultural self-representation.

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[49] See Webster's 1878 speech in support of suffrage; also Boos, "Augusta Webster" and Leighton "Because Men Made the Laws" 122.

[50] A frequent criticism of the repeal movement by recent feminists is the tendency of its leaders to represent women solely as victims; see, for example, Dubois and Gordon, 38.

The middle-class repealers' identification with their working-class and "fallen" sisters denied both conceptually and materially the opposition between bourgeois and working-class women, ladies and prostitutes.[51] That affirmation of solidarity represents, as Janet Murray observes, "one of the most radical and imaginative efforts" of the Victorian era (391). Poovey convincingly outlines the historical reasons that made such an identification across the lines of class possible for many Victorian women and impossible for most Victorian men:

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[51] The most disturbing aspect of the campaign for Victorians, apart from the breach of decorum involved in women speaking out at all and on such a subject, was the depiction of a wrong done to a prostitute as a wrong done to a "lady." The breach of decorum was a considerable factor. Butler recalls an M.P. writing to her: "We know how to manage any other opposition in the House or in the country, but this is very awkward for us--this revolt of the women. It is quite a new thing; what are we to do with such an opposition as this?" (Personal Reminiscences 20).

> [W]omen were solicited differently by representations of gender than were men at mid-century. By this, I do not mean simply that women had a different investment than men in the subject of female sexuality because they were women; rather, that because the "problem" of sexuality was articulated in relation _to_ women and because women's roles were given initially _by_ their sex, women's investment was first of all _in_ the representation of gender and only secondarily in other determinants of identity such as class.[52]

Repeal feminists affirmed their subversive identification with other women primarily through adopting the persona and voice of the prostitute.[53] Butler stressed the significance of this unified voice:

> It is only when the slave begins to move, to complain, to give signs of life and resistance, either by his own voice or by the voice of one like himself speaking for him, that the struggle for freedom truly begins. The slave now speaks. The enslaved women have found a voice in one of themselves . . . . a voice calling to holy rebellion and to war. (_Personal Reminiscences_ 320)

Hélène Cixous considers that "a privilege of _voice_" is where one begins to sense a feminine practice of writing.[54] Butler, though in very different language, expounds on the necessity and implications of voice in the campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts:

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[52] "Speaking of the Body" 42-43. Similarly, Sally Mitchell notes that in the 1860s "power was in the hands of those who had money and education. Though middle-class women had begun to seek both, the gains were not in hand until the end of the decade.... Meanwhile the woman who was sensitive to the world around her began to perceive other circumstances--besides personal poverty--that gave her more in common with women of lower classes than with men of her own" (101).

[53] Although repeal feminists clearly had a stake in the legislative treatment of women, they did not appropriate the issues by obscuring the class-specific nature of the Acts. It is noteworthy that, as Walkowitz remarks, "In marked contrast to most interclass reform movements, the feminist repeal effort tended to accentuate rather than obscure class differences" (_Prostitution_ 146).

[54] Cixous writes "First I sense femininity in writing by: a privilege of _voice_: _writing_ and _voice_ are entwined and interwoven . . . . Her discourse, even when 'theoretical' or political, is never simple or linear or 'objectivized,' universalized; she involves her story in history" (_Newly Born Woman_ 92).

> As a simple assertion of one woman speaking for tens of thousands of women, those two words "we rebel" are very necessary and very useful for [men] to hear. The cry of women crushed under the yoke of legalised vice is not the cry of a statistician or a medical expert; it is simply a cry of pain, a cry for justice. . . . It is imperfect, no doubt, as an utterance; but the cry of the revolted woman against her oppressor . . . is far more needful at this moment than any reasoned-out argument. (Personal Reminiscences 319)

She also, in anticipation of Virginia Woolf and Elaine Showalter, asserted: "The conspiracy of silence of the press . . . has forced us to create a literature of our own" (Personal Reminiscences 402).

This emphasis on cultural self-representation clearly connects to the concept of political representation and the two merge in repeal feminists' public adoption of the cause of their culturally silenced sisters.[55] "The Ladies' National Association leadership referred to themselves as 'the representatives of the women actually opposed & insulted by the Acts.'"[56] The repeal campaign in fact coincides with the kindling of the women's suffrage movement, which had strong ideological and organizational affinities with the feminist repeal movement.[57] A major aspect of their ideological similarity was a common interest in altering the cultural depiction of women. In order to prove themselves capable of responsible participation in political life, suffragists had to challenge the cultural representations of women. Cora Kaplan explains why intervention in dominant discourses of sexuality was so important to women seeking political representation: "the notion of women as politically enabled and independent is fatally linked to the unrestrained and vicious exercise of her sexuality" ("Wild Nights" 162). It was thus of great importance to feminists to challenge sexual stereotypes of women, such as those assumed and perpetuated by the Contagious Diseases Acts. For if men, such as the speaker of "Jenny," could see a likeness to prostitutes in "respectable" women, it became crucial to middle-class women to free the prostitute from cultural representations of her debased subjectivity.[58] The aims of the repealers were thus very closely knit with the interests of suffragists.

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[55] Butler, in the 1868 pamphlet The Education and Employment of Women, noted that women "are unrepresented, and the interests of the unrepresented always tend to be overlooked" (Autobiographical Memoir 80).

[56] Butler, Letter to an M.P., Feb. 1883, Butler Collection, British Library; qtd. in Kent 74.

[57] Although Mary Smith presented a franchise petition to the House of Commons in 1832, it went "largely unnoticed" (Levine, "Humanising Influences" 295). The first petition demanding female suffrage to receive widespread attention was presented in 1866, and the National Society for Women's Suffrage formed the following year. Jacob Bright, who introduced the first Women's Suffrage bill before Parliament in 1870, was also a strong supporter of the repeal campaign (Lewis Before the Vote 2). "65.5 per cent of MPs opposed to the Women's Disabilities Bill in 1870 also voted against the repeal Bills; by 1876 the proportion had risen to 70 per cent. "Many women told Millicent Garrett Fawcett . . . that they came to the suffrage movement after working with, knowing, or hearing of Josephine Butler" (Kent, 9; based on Fawcett, Josephine Butler (London 1927), 29). Possibly one of the most telling indications of the connection between the two movements is provided by Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy: "at the start of the militant [suffrage] campaign, she deluged members of

The dominant Victorian discourses of sexuality underwrote both the Contagious Diseases Acts and female disenfranchisement. Yet, as the repeal campaign illustrates, women were able to intervene in and effectively participate in a shift in these discourses. They were able to contest the constructions of male and female sexuality which underwrote the Contagious Diseases Acts, possibly

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Parliament with letters threatening an agitation stronger even than that which forced the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts" (Banks, Biographical Dictionary I, 227).

[58] The repeal campaign was perceived as a positive, as well as a negative, example of the ability of women to conduct themselves as political subjects. The Spectator remarked in 1870 that the women's campaign provided "a new idea of women's intellectual courage and capacity for political life" ("The Contagious Diseases' Act" 39).

because, in Foucault's analysis, "Sexuality is not the most intractable element in power relations," but is instead instrumental "for the greatest number of maneuvers . . . as a linchpin, for the most varied strategies" (History of Sexuality 103).

Poovey underscores the importance of understanding such transitions within discourses of sexuality:

> [W]e need to be able to theorize both how women have been able to enter discourses from which they have been initially excluded so as to begin to represent themselves, and how to read texts that mark the passage of women from objects of another's discourse to women as subjects of their own. ("Speaking of the Body" 29)

"Jenny" and "A Castaway" reveal some of the complex dynamics which made Victorian discourses of sexuality susceptible to the intervention and appropriation of feminist repealers. "Jenny" explores the mutual and internal contradictions in Victorian representations of female sexuality, and reveals Jenny's status as an object of cultural discourse. However, the subject position of the speaker makes him complicit in Jenny's economic exploitation, as well as in her status as silenced object of male discourse, so his analysis proves confused and limited. The speaker also, despite his perceptions of some "common kindred link" between "pure" and "fallen" women, reasserts the discursive differences between them and concludes that "pure" women cannot intervene or even know of Jenny. But by 1870 the evangelical "rescue" of prostitutes by respectable women was well underway and the feminist repeal campaign was exploding into action. "A Castaway," like "Jenny," is an innovation in the literary representation of the "fallen" woman in its emphasis on "sexual economics." It also, by making Eulalie the speaking subject of her monologue, enacts aesthetically the feminist repeal strategy of identification with the prostitute.

Elizabeth Grosz's reading of Kristeva neatly suggests the significant connection between "A Castaway" and its historical context:

> The speaking subject is not merely an individual producer of texts, an 'author,' but is symptomatic of a social organization: the ruptures and breaches in the ordered functioning of meaning and coherence mirror, even forecast, ruptures in social unities at the level of the State and ideological institutions. Textual analysis is thus simultaneously political and psychological in its implications. (Grosz, Subversions 41)

The historical period in which "A Castaway" was written saw the evolution of a female political subject. The repeal campaign was the first major political intervention made by British women. It simultaneously contributed to and marked the appearance of a new type of middle-class female subject in Britain, who spoke and acted publicly and politically, rather than privately and philanthropically, on behalf of herself and other women. The suffragist's fight for political representation depended on the shift in the discourses of sexuality and on the assertion of a speaking female subject effected in part by the feminist campaigners against the Contagious Diseases Acts. As Poovey observes:

> Given the fact that gender remained a site of cultural contestation, it matters less that the image of female sexuality generated by feminists like Butler was not necessarily a positive one, than that Butler's campaign meant that women had begun to participate actively in constructing the female subject--a subject that theoretically represented themselves. ("Speaking of the Body" 44-45)

Webster's Eulalie is both reflective and constitutive of this construction of a new female subject. On the basis of an economic analysis of her position, she is able to combat the social stigma which would render her silent. She asserts:

> I have looked coolly on my what and why,
> and I accept myself. (41)

Eulalie speaks for herself in the debate over prostitution and female inequality. The most scandalous of female Others claims her right to self-assessment and self-representation and, in so doing, promotes and participates in the widespread demand by women in later Victorian Britain for cultural and political self-representation.

CHAPTER FIVE: Conclusions

This thesis has been concerned with engendering genre by means of both theoretical and textual analysis; these complementary domains have converged in the notion of "literary subjectivity." Chapter One attempts to assemble a theory of genre which takes gender into account. Its insistence on genres as culturally constructed and so necessarily gendered modes of perception is conjoined with a notion of Althusserian interpellation as a primary textual function. The need to articulate a working model of genre that accounts for both the structuring or regulatory force of genre and its transformability, as well as allowing for an interconstitutive relation of generic to social change, suggested an analogy between the constitution of the literary subject in genre and the formation of the Lacanian subject in language. This psychoanalytic engendering of genre theory, rather than generating an ahistorical and totalizing reading of textual processes, actually provides a valuable theoretical foundation for an approach to genre by affording a model of language as both constitutive of and produced by historical and social processes, and as subject to change in concert with other material conditions. The ensuing readings of specific texts demonstrate that genres do not necessarily carry fixed ideological freight, but instead take meaning within the variable matrices of social discourse.

The three textually-oriented chapters seek to engender genre historically; that is, to discern in the texts under consideration the issues of gender at stake in particular genres, and to understand the creation, or engendering, of new genres as concomitant with other discursive and political dimensions of the historical movement called the Woman Question in mid- to late-Victorian Britain. The tension between romance and Bildungsroman evident in the representation of women in narrative poetry embodies a literary dimension of the widespread debate over women's ontological status which was at the crux of many aspects of the Woman Question, including the bid for higher education and the reform of property law regarding married women. Yet the inscription of gendered forms of subjectivity by romance and Bildungsroman is not static; the difficulties posed by a female narrative of education and development which are explored in Browne's Ignatia and Clough's Bothie are successfully negotiated in Barrett Browning's employment and subversion of the romance plot in Aurora Leigh. The Romantic subject inscribed in the latter poem is thrown into question, however, by the representation in contemporary closet drama of the female subject as contingent and divided rather than unified and transcendent; George Eliot's "Armgart" in particular presents a sustained critique of the emancipatory claims associated with such a subject position. Along with Webster's A Woman Sold and Smedley's "Lady Grace," "Armgart" also raises the question of narrative versus drama and the differing implications of the two forms for inscribing female protagonists. My analysis suggests that the attraction of this form for women poets dealing with the Woman Question lay in part in the freedom it provided from both the immediacy of the lyric voice and the mediating, adjudicating presence of narrative; this aspect of closet drama also allows inscriptions of female protagonists who, while asserting their subjectivity by means of direct speech and action, are also subject to the constraints of their social milieu.

Exploration of the connection between shifting discourses of sexuality in the controversy over the Contagious Diseases Acts and the representation of prostitutes continues the previous consideration of dramatic form and first-person voice. The dramatic monologue maintains through the intersection of the speaker's various and conflicting discourses the dialogism apparent in the novelized narrative poetry of Chapter One and in the differing voices of the closet dramas in Chapter Two. This internalized dialogism, however, places greater stress on the speaker's relationship to language, and highlights the contradictions within and between discourses, as well as the constructedness of social identities. The different genders of the speakers of "Jenny" and "A Castaway," however, significantly effect the terms in which this inquiry is conducted, as well as the degree to which it can be sustained. The speakers' subject positions also have crucial ramifications for the inscription of female subjectivity in the two poems. While both speakers wrestle with the contradictions and slippages in Victorian discourses of sexuality, Rossetti's speaker remains relatively detached, while Webster's Eulalie emerges as a subject split not simply by social contradiction but by linguistic and discursive fracturing, and bearing a significant relation to the emergence of a female political subject in campaigns such as that against the Contagious Diseases Acts.

A number of conclusions and suggestions for future study emerge from this analysis. First of all, it suggests that readings of Victorian poetry must be informed by a greater awareness of gender and the debates of the Woman Question. The texts I have chosen to consider in this study are not central to the Victorian poetic canon. Mary Ann Browne's work is virtually unknown and perhaps hardly "Victorian"; Clough's "Say not the struggle nought availeth" is taught more frequently than the longer Bothie; to judge from recent introductions to the field, Aurora Leigh remains, despite increasing attention from feminist critics, marginal in mainstream scholarly minds (Blamires; Richards). The poetic drama considered in Chapter Three forms a part of neither the literary history nor the curriculum of Victorian poetry; "Armgart" is studied as an anomalous verse production by a great novelist. Webster's work is occasionally included in recent anthologies, but not "A Castaway," which leaves "Jenny" as the only text likely to be presented to the average student of Victorian poetry. Yet, although I have chosen these texts to explore the complex interrelation of gender and genre in Victorian poetry, I am not arguing for an isolated sub-set of a "Woman Question Movement" within the larger set of Victorian poetry. On the contrary, I am arguing that the engagements with gender in these texts are less the exception than the rule, and indicate an active participation by Victorian poetry in the Victorian period's most multifaceted, pervasive, and central series of discursive contestations.

Clearly, my study has applications extending beyond Victorian poetry, and I will turn to the more general implications of my analysis in the latter half of this chapter. I am concerned, however, also to address my conclusions to this particular field, for two complementary reasons. Firstly, criticism of Victorian poetry has tended towards insularity and has, with a few significant exceptions, largely resisted the challenges posed by contemporary literary theory and the revisionary activities of feminist scholars. Secondly, those engaged in more theoretical or gender-conscious considerations of Victorian literature, saving those concerned with rediscovering female poets, have inclined to address themselves to fiction rather than poetry. These tendencies have combined to produce a critical moment at which, despite the presence of some substantial theoretically informed and feminist studies of Victorian poetry, it is necessary to advocate a reorientation of Victorian poetry studies. In a sense, then, this study attempts to mediate between those within Victorian poetry studies who have ignored feminism and theory, and those without who have ignored Victorian poetry.

Thus, in addition to positing a gendered understanding of genre and generic change, this study aims to join others in laying the ground for different ways of reading Victorian poetry. The first difference is historicization: that we cease to understand Victorian poetry as a drama played before a backdrop of "historical context," and instead read texts as fully imbricated and implicated, in both form and content, in the changing historical conditions of which the "Victorian era" consists. The second, related, difference, is a theoretical reorientation of Victorian poetry studies to consider the vital way in which literary forms and social formations are interdependent and interconstitutive, and how they interact in the construction and deployment of categories such as gender. The connections are easier to see in works such as "Jenny" or "Armgart," in which there is thematic engagement with the Woman Question, but to return to Bakhtin's description, if genre is "a valorized mode of perception," it is necessarily intimately bound up with the construction of gender: any work of literature, indeed any act of representation, participates in that construction (Dialogic Imagination 28). A Bildungsroman which unlike The Bothie does not problematize the status of the female others in the text, whether prostitutes, sweethearts, or wives, nonetheless participates in an influential representation of male subjectivity.

When I began "Engendering Genre" I initially planned to deal with three dramatic monologues in the fourth chapter. In addition to "Jenny" and "A

Castaway" I intended to deal with Pompilia's monologue from Robert Browning's *The Ring and the Book*. As the chapter developed into a historically specific analysis of contested representations of prostitution in the late 1860s, "Pompilia" was no longer relevant to its central concerns. Yet I felt compelled to deal with Browning's text for a number of reasons. It seems to me an ideal test case for my argument about the interrelatedness of gender and genre in Victorian poetry. Robert Buchanan heralded *The Ring and the Book*, on its publication in 1869, as "the supremest poetical achievement" of the Victorian period, and since then numerous critics have concurred with that assessment (Review 399). They have, moreover, associated the work's success with the formal experimentation that, in the view of Bernard Richards "amounts to the creation of what is virtually a new genre" (95). Yet critical consensus links *The Ring and the Book*'s generic innovation to the exploration of epistemological and aesthetic questions, in contrast to, for example, *Aurora Leigh*, whose generic experimentation is quite directly associated with a feminist poetics. I was therefore convinced of the importance of demonstrating that this formally experimental, canonically central text was as thoroughly imbricated in the Woman Question as the other poetry considered in my inquiry. For these reasons--and despite the possibility that introducing a fresh text into my conclusion may itself involve generic transgression--I present here a relatively brief consideration of "Pompilia" as an indication of how this study's engendering of genre could revise current understandings of Victorian poetry.

"Pompilia"

"Pompilia" is the seventh book of The Ring and the Book, and with "Giuseppe Caponsacchi" it occupies the center of the text. Yet "Pompilia" has not received the lion's share of critical attention given to The Ring and the Book. The majority of critics have structured their inquiries around the issues of truth and artistry foregrounded in the framing books, "The Ring and the Book" and "The Book and the Ring"; in so doing they have also, as William Walker has pointed out, tended to "exempt" Pompilia's monologue "from those elements which are claimed to distort the accounts given by other speakers in the poem" (47). Pompilia has been represented almost universally, by feminist and non-feminist critics alike, as a passive victim who pours forth on her deathbed an ingenuous testimony to her own innocence. The assumption of Pompilia's innocence raises another region of broad critical consensus: the central action of the work is taken to be the trial of Guido,--is he guilty or innocent, damned or saved--when it is actually Pompilia who is on trial.

Pompilia is on trial as a fallen woman: she left her husband and escaped in the company of a priest towards Rome. Although some legal niceties are at stake, not to mention the murder of her putative parents, the outcome of Pompilia's trial for adultery determines that of her husband's trial for murder, for under seventeenth-century Roman law a husband could kill an adulterous wife to restore his "honour."[1] Guido's mistake, he asserts, was in not killing Pompilia and Caponsacchi after overtaking them on the road to Rome:

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[1] By "trial" I do not refer to the formal trials which predate the time-frame of The Ring and the Book, either the ecclesiastical trial which makes no finding as regards Pompilia, or the trial held in Guido's home town of Arezzo which finds her guilty. As Ann P. Brady argues: "It is Pompilia who is on trial for her decisions and values which go contrary to cultural mores. The final judgement of

> I did not take the license the law's self gives
> To slay both criminals o' the spot at the time,
> But held my hand,--preferred play prodigy
> Of patience which the world calls cowardice,
> Rather than seem anticipate the law
> And cast discredit on its organs . . . . (V.1878-83)[2]

He argues that the ecclesiastical court had in fact found them guilty of adultery, hence Caponsacchi's banishment to Civita Vecchia, and that he was therefore within his rights to kill his wife nine months later with the help of four hired assassins.

More abstractly, Pompilia is on trial for asserting herself and attempting self-determination in the face of directives to the contrary from the authorities of husband, church and state. Guido appears more perturbed by her insubordination than by her alleged adultery. She has broken the contract of marriage which gave him possession of her, body and soul:

> --the law's the law:
> With a wife I look to find all wifeliness,
> As when I buy, timber and twig, a tree--
> I buy the song o' the nightingale inside.
>
> Such was the pact: Pompilia from the first
> Broke it, refused from the beginning day
> Either in body or soul to cleave to mine,
> And published it forthwith to all the world. (V.603-10)

Guido's articulation of Pompilia's real crime, reveals that far from beginning with a real or imagined cuckoldry it is quite independent of male agency. As E. Warwick Slinn remarks, "Pompilia refuses to submit, or rather submits in an act

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the court on her behalf is a moral victory for her and a reversal of societal norms" (15).

[2] Robert Browning, The Ring and the Book, ed. Richard D. Altick (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971). All parenthetical references are to this edition; references without a book number are to Book VII, "Pompilia."

of such overt passivity that it parodies and undercuts the submission he [Guido] needs for his identity" (Discourse of Self 176). Pompilia's assertion of independence and subjectivity is at the crux of the offence; this is why Pompilia, rather than Caponsacchi, is the object of Guido's revenge. Furthermore, Guido claims to have acted for society's good; that Pompilia's insurrection represents a fatal inversion of the established social order and hierarchies; that in murdering his wife he was setting right the natural order; and that by acquitting him they can create a "Utopia":

> Rome rife with honest women and strong men,
> Manners reformed, old habits back once more,
> Customs that recognize the standard worth,--
> The wholesome household rule in force again,
> Husbands once more God's representative,
> Wives like the typical Spouse once more, and Priests
> No longer men of Belial . . . . (V.2039-45)

The association between Guido and the society of The Ring and the Book is crucial to feminist readings such as Ann P. Brady's, which argues that the patriarchal order is also tried and condemned through its agent, Guido. According to Brady, "Every monologue" in Browning's "novel"

> reveals how completely aware he is of the sexual cynicism emanating from the core of a patriarchal society. He forthrightly addresses these issues with their destructive effects on women, and exposes them to an equally patriarchal society in his own Victorian England. (125-26)

She calls the work "a powerfully incisive feminist judgement on the androcentric mores of patriarchy, and on its concomitant subjugation of women" (126). The Ring and the Book is a text which emphasizes the interweaving of the personal and the political. Pompilia's is the story of a battered woman who finds, in turning to the authorities of church and state for help, that her abuse is sanctioned, encouraged even, by them. Guido continuously asserts in his defence that his behavior is permitted by and even essential to the social order which he, as a male aristocrat, upholds: "Absolve, then, me, law's mere executant! / Protect your own defender,--save me, Sirs!" (V.2003-2004).

As Brady's remarks hint, the internal topicality of The Ring and the Book, its emphasis on the details and debates of seventeenth-century Rome, on the social fabric into which its story is woven, paradoxically accentuates the sense of continuity between that world and the world in which the poem was written and published. This emphasis on the social, particularly the relationship between individuals and the institutions of the family, marriage, law, church, and state, is what distinguishes Browning's text from many other Victorian poems set in the past, for the complexity of the life depicted resembles more the texture of "modern," "civilized" life than a past, or pastoral, age marked primarily by nostalgic difference from the present.[3] The insistence on the social also goes some distance towards exonerating The Ring and the Book from the charges made by Nina Auerbach, among others, that it ignores Barrett Browning's critique of backward-looking verse ("Robert Browning's Last Word" 94ff.). Aurora Leigh asserts as part of her poetic manifesto:

> I do distrust a poet who discerns
> No character or glory in his times,
> And trundles back his soul five hundred years,
> Past moat and drawbridge, into a castle-court,
> To sing--oh, not of lizard or of toad
> Alive i' the ditch there,--'twere excusable,

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[3] Roma King makes a similar point when she observes that Browning's "awareness of the limits of human reason and his distrust of those values codified in social customs and institutions . . . reflect more nearly the skeptical mood of the nineteenth than of the seventeenth century" (133).

> But of some black chief, half knight, half sheep-lifter,
> Some beauteous dame, half chattel and half queen . . . . (Aurora Leigh V.189-96)

It is true that The Ring and the Book portrays a wife in a society which treats wives as chattel.[4] Yet, far from depicting such treatment of women as universal and natural, the poem emphasizes that the conditions it represents are historically specific and socially produced. Such treatment brings these issues into alignment with Victorian debate over precisely the same matters. Julia Wedgewood illustrates, in a letter to Browning, the ease with which The Ring and the Book inserted itself into the debate over the Woman Question: "The speech about the pain of womanliness is to me a wonderful revelation of apprehension of our side of the question" (142).

There are many points of continuity between the concerns of The Ring and the Book and the Victorian Woman Question. Pompilia's predicament recalls the well-known story of Caroline Norton, whose abusive and philandering husband charged her with adultery with her friend Melbourne, and who left her husband only to lose custody of her children. A property-based marriage system which makes women their husbands' chattels, denies them the status of persons, and sanctions the sexual double standard comes under one of the most sustained attacks in Victorian literature in The Ring and the Book. In addition to these resonances of Victorian gender issues, there are more specific points of continuity. Pompilia displays an identification with her unknown mother, a prostitute, and a concomitant distrust of cultural representations of women, similar to that of the women who contested the Contagious Diseases Acts. She reverses the terms of a society that blames her, to assert the continuity between her mother's victimization as a prostitute and her own experience of marriage:

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[4] See for example the uses of the word at V.430 and VII.520.

> My own real mother, whom I never knew,
> Who did wrong (if she needs must have done wrong)
> Through being all her life, not my four years,
> At mercy of the hateful . . . . (864-67)

Pompilia bases her identification with her mother--"Well, since she had to bear this brand--let me!"--on a skepticism about the pronouncements of a hypocritical society: "Why should I trust those that speak ill of you, / When I mistrust who speaks even well of them?" (874, 884-85).[5]

These resonances with the matter of the Woman Question indicate that while The Ring and the Book situates itself in the seventeenth century, it represents a thoroughly Victorian engagement with the politics of gender. At this point, I want to move on to a further, more serious criticism offered by feminists from Ethel Mayne in 1913 to Nina Auerbach in 1984 of Browning's representation of Pompilia as victim. For such critics, a conservative alignment in the representational issues which surround gender is evident in the depiction of Pompilia as a victim. Auerbach in fact, drawing on the oft-noted similarities between Pompilia and Barrett Browning, considers Browning's portrayal of The Ring and the Book's only female speaker as an illiterate "victim/queen" in terms of a very adversarial artistic relationship: "It may be Robert Browning's ultimate victory over his celebrated wife that he robs Pompilia of a public voice" ("Robert Browning's Last Word" 103).

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[5] Also like the repealers, Pompilia appropriates a culturally dominant discourse, in this context religion rather than economics, in order to make her case in terms that are comprehensible to her audience. As Slinn argues, she can be seen throughout her narrative "appropriating the image of the Madonna" in the construction of her identity in language (169).

In her assessment of the general moral alignment of The Ring and the Book, Auerbach would seem to concur with the summary provided by Paul Turner: "For Browning . . . Guido was absolutely evil, and Pompilia (despite documentary evidence to the contrary) was absolutely good" (50). Auerbach simply opposes as anti-feminist the terms in which she understands Pompilia to be constructed as "good." Along with Turner and many other critics, she also highlights the discrepancy between the poem and Browning's historical source material, the Old Yellow Book, which provides evidence that Pompilia was literate and hence at least capable of writing the love letters adduced at the trial as proof of her infidelity. Thus, Auerbach's indignation that Browning "blessed" Pompilia with illiteracy accepts unquestioningly Pompilia's own repeated assertions that she cannot read; Auerbach also implicitly endorses the prevalent critical view, again expressed by Turner, that "Pompilia talks with a touching simplicity that seems entirely her own."[6] Feminist objections to the representation of Pompilia and standard critical readings of "Pompilia" thus converge in an assessment of her as utterly passive in her relation to language and the world around her.

However, it seems rather surprising that any speaker of a dramatic monologue by Robert Browning should be taken at his or, less often, her word. Only recently have several critics, most notably William Walker, challenged the view that Pompilia's speech is transparent and unreflective self-expression, and a disinterested expression of the "truth." Walker argues that "Pompilia's account shares the characteristics of the other monologues which make their relation to truth problematical" (47). Many of the rhetorical aims and devices he highlights--her use of sarcasm and irony, her "sophisticated discourse of shifting tone," her employment of rhetorical strategies similar to Guido's--suggest that Pompilia and her monologue are more complex than most critics have assumed (52). As critics such as Walker and Slinn have demonstrated, her monologue is "not exempt from the subversive power of what the Pope calls the 'filthy rags of speech'" (Walker 60; X.372). In fact, she may also be a less passive, more sophisticated, and more effective speaker than even these critics contemplate.

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[6] Turner 51. For example, Auerbach makes reference to "the authenticity of Pompilia's truth," accepting that the text constructs it as truth, though objecting to its means of doing so ("Robert Browning's Last Word" 103).

Pompilia is on trial, and she knows it. Her narrative works, as Walker states, to exonerate Caponsacchi, but she also speaks on her own behalf. The narrator in "The Ring and the Book" says that it was thought she took so miraculously long to die "Just that Pompilia might defend herself" (I.1080).[7] "A defense," Walker observes, "presupposes an accusative agent and judgmental body that is addressed, which is to say a form of audience" (48). While Pompilia is not testifying in a court of law as Guido is in his first monologue, she does have a body of listeners, according to Book I, which includes the nuns who are caring for her, as well as "leech and man of law" (I.1087). A defence also suggests persuasive rhetorical strategy, which Pompilia's monologue amply exhibits. Her defence is so effective that generations of critics have believed it implicitly.

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[7] This is a view which is encouraged by Pompilia herself, who exclaims "And how my life seems lengthened as to serve" (1193).

One instance of a common rhetorical strategy in Pompilia's defence is her refusal to specify the acts of abuse committed by Guido, claiming in places amnesia--"All since [her marriage] is one blank" (583)--and in places a reluctance to incriminate him:

> Whereupon . . . no, I leave my husband out!
> It is not to do him more hurt, I speak.
> Let it suffice, when misery was most,
> One day, I swooned and got a respite so. (1134-37)

The repeated innuendo of lines such as "pushed back to him and, for my pains, / Paid with . . . but why remember what is past?" effectively leaves the form of abuse to the audience's imagination, while emphasizing its brutal effects by her very refusal to recall: "And so more days, more deeds I must forget, / Till . . . " (1280-81, 1190-91; ellipses in original). This strategy is similar to the one Walker notes in Pompilia's "displacement from herself to others of imagery which would, as [Park] Honan claims, bespeak bitterness or hatred on her part" (59). This is the case in the powerful passage early in her monologue in which she indirectly vilifies Guido:

> All the seventeen years,
> Not once did a suspicion visit me
> How very different a lot is mine
> From any other woman's in the world.
> The reason must be, 't was by step and step
> It got to grow so terrible and strange:
> These strange woes stole on tiptoe, as it were,
> Into my neighbourhood and privacy,
> Sat down where I sat, laid them where I lay;
> And I was found familiarized with fear,
> When friends broke in, held up a torch and cried
> 'Why, you Pompilia in the cavern thus,
> How comes that arm of yours about a wolf?
> And the soft length,--lies in and out your feet
> And laps you round the knee,--a snake it is!'
> And so on. (113-28)

The passage is indicative of how Pompilia transmutes her life into an elaborate representation of passivity and victimization, for her assertions in this passage directly conflict with the events of her life. Far from being naively ignorant of the wrongs done to her during the four years of her marriage, Pompilia has been outraged by and actively opposed to them from the start. She decided independently that her husband's treatment was unacceptable and attempted every institutional recourse and avenue of escape possible to her in Arezzo: priests and archbishops, the Governor, her adoptive parents, even the cousin-in-law who was attempting to seduce her. And far from waiting in a cavern with her fairy-tale wolf and Edenic serpent, only to be discovered by "friends," she takes the initiative to escape from her husband. Pompilia thus represents herself as passive when, to judge from what we know of her actions, she was decidedly active.

What we "know" of Pompilia, just as what we "know" of all the other characters in The Ring and the Book, is entirely based on interpretation of the textual material. Given her attempt throughout her monologue to exonerate herself by portraying herself as passive and powerless, it seems to me less than clear that Pompilia is illiterate. It is of course impossible to prove that one is illiterate; one can only assert it and have that assertion corroborated by others, which Pompilia does. But what would one conclude in a different Browning monologue of a speaker who repeatedly makes such an unprovable but exculpatory claim? Pompilia reiterates her inability to read throughout her monologue, asserting it directly at least five times, once in the mouth of her maid, and alluding to it often. However, she exhibits an unusual conceptual command of writing as well as a strange tendency to privilege writing in her own speech, which casts doubt on her claim to ignorance. It is interesting, for example, that when she opens her monologue by stating that her age is seventeen, she immediately provides a source of official corroboration, saying it is "writ so . . . in the church's register, / Lorenzo in Lucina, all my names" (3-4). She adds that "Also 't is writ that I was married there / Four years ago," and expresses the hope that "a word or two" will be added regarding the birth and name of her son when they record her death (8-9). Such primary emphasis on written correlatives of her identity and history, rather than, for example, on people who can corroborate such aspects of her life, suggests a literate rather than an illiterate construction of identity.

This impression that Pompilia's thought-processes are literate rather than oral is borne out by some of the key images in her monologue. As Slinn has noted, Pompilia exhibits a sophisticated "subjectivity that is alert to the ironies of representation," from the "laughable" fact of the six names for "one poor child," to the figures in a tapestry that Pompilia and Tisbe names after themselves: "You know the figures never were ourselves / Though we nicknamed them so" (Discourse of Self 164; 7, 5, 194-95). Yet her speech reveals not simply the "potential separation of external fact from internal representation" that Slinn emphasizes, but an understanding of language, and written language at that. She distinguishes Caponsacchi, for example, from the way that her maid has represented him, in terms of the linguistic tag attached to him: "the name, / --Not the man, but the name of him, thus made / Into a mockery and disgrace" (1338-40). Pompilia expresses indignation throughout at the corruption of representational practices, and the divorce between the order of discourse and the order of reality, whether at the incongruity of the grand names which she does not actually possess to the "nicknames" people give to Caponsacchi in supposing him her lover (160). Even more striking is her image of Caponsacchi saving her by reading her correctly, by affirming her understanding of herself by recovering the palimpsest and reinscribing the true, divine text which has been distorted and overwritten by the human and the social:

> Ever the face upturned to mine, the hand
> Holding my hand across the world,--a sense
> That reads, as only such can read, the mark
> God sets on woman, signifying so
> She should--shall peradventure--be divine;
> Yet, 'ware, the while, how weakness mars the print
> And makes confusion, leaves the thing men see,
> --Not this man,--who from his soul, re-writes
> The obliterated charter . . . . (1497-1505).

It is difficult to believe that such an elaborate metaphor of textual corruption could issue from illiteracy.

In his post-structuralist analysis of Pompilia as split subject, Slinn argues that "While Pompilia's role as victim governs her character as the product of her narrative (the person-as-thing), what dominates her consciousness as the speaking subject (the person-as-process) is the crisis brought about when the external certainties of her existence prove to be illusions, when the objective facts of her world dissolve" (Discourse of Self 164). Yet Slinn, while countering earlier readings of the monologue as static and transparent, nevertheless considers Pompilia's monologue that of one held by the language which reflects her unacknowledged desire: "Her perception of Caponsacchi's responses, therefore, as verifying the sign of her divinity is crucial to the consummation of her discourse--to the confirmation of her spiritual identity" (168). Thus, although he stresses the sophistication of the monologue, Slinn reduces it to psychic, rather than rhetorical, complexity on the part of the speaker. Hence, unlike

Walker, who raises at least the possibility of Pompilia's guilt,[8] Slinn makes the rather weak pronouncement that his analysis "is not to suggest that she is a spiritual fraud, but . . . that her monologue is open to reading ambiguous intentions," including hidden intentions which are apparently unacknowledged by the speaker herself (167). However, the representation of herself as person-as-thing is basic rhetorical strategy on her part; even what Slinn describes as person-as-process is often the product of rhetoric: in describing how the world has failed her, Pompilia makes her case.

While one can conclude that Browning did, as critics claim, ignore the historical evidence that Pompilia was literate and unconsciously imbued her speech with the thought-patterns of his own literate mind, there remains the alternate possibility that Browning created a character who is literate, but suppresses the fact to strengthen her case. The latter conclusion has the added virtue of removing "Pompilia" from its exceptional status within the Browning canon, and according it the same complexity and sophistication usually attached to such monologues. The corollary to this revised view of "Pompilia" is that Pompilia is extraordinarily successful in her attempts to represent herself as passive, innocent, and illiterate, and that Pompilia's critics, as well as her society, have read out the agency that is evident in the narrative of The Ring and the Book and which underlies the rhetorical manoeuvers of her monologue within it. Pompilia can thus be read as replicating the rhetorical strategy identified in the campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts in the previous chapter: she actively asserts herself as passive, a social victim, in order to justify her assertive actions. As the object of her discourse she is social victim; as speaker she is linguistic and social agent. The similarity is strengthened by the fact that Pompilia's defiance is understood by Guido and other members of society as a rebellion with radical political implications.

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[8] The time-frame of The Ring and the Book makes it conceivable that Pompilia's son Gaetano, if born slightly prematurely, was conceived on the flight to Rome. In favour of this possibility is the unlikelihood that Pompilia could have known, as she claims to have, that she was pregnant less than two weeks after conception; she gives this as her reason for deciding to flee. Walker notes her insistence that Guido is not the father, that Gaetano was conceived in love rather than hate, and that she shows no ambivalence towards the offspring of a man she hates and fears. There is, however, an obvious precedent for such mother-love in Marian in Aurora Leigh, a figure who is associated, as Pompilia associates herself, with the Virgin Mary. As well, Guido, in attempting to obtain custody of the child, exhibits no uncertainty that it is his.

Auerbach's condemnation of "Pompilia" may be based on a misreading of what the text does, and a failure to distinguish between important formal differences from earlier Browning poems: whereas Pompilia represents herself through her own speech, the Duchess of Ferrara, an earlier victim of a murderous husband, is simply a silent, hanging, representation.[9] Pompilia is the object of others' representations and her own, but in speaking she establishes herself, very assertively in fact, as a subject--claiming Caponsacchi as hers for example, with "He was mine, he is mine, he will be mine"--and asserting the absolute truth of her speech (1443). While it is true that Browning's poem does not employ the strategy of "A Castaway," in which one is given only Eulalie's representation of herself, and the female poet's speech doubles and reinforces that of her speaker, it is not true that Pompilia is utterly silenced and marginalized. While her voice is not the public voice of Aurora Leigh that

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[9] Brady suggests a reading of what Browning does to Pompilia that contests Auerbach's insistence on her silence: "Pompilia Comparini, who comes across the pages of the Old Yellow Book as an unfortunate, faceless victim, Browning has transformed into a brave, self-directed young woman" (133).

Auerbach wishes it were, it is a public voice in the same sense that Eulalie's voice (which unlike Pompilia's lacked an audience within the putative context of its utterance) is public: it is published, and as such intervenes in the literary and social discourses of Victorian Britain.

When we read the agency back into "Pompilia" it becomes difficult to concur with an unremittingly critical assessment of the gender politics of Browning's representation of Pompilia. Similarly, it is possible to read the agency back into Pompilia's role in the narrative of The Ring and the Book to an extent that challenges the views of critics such as Adrienne Auslander Munich that Browning simply reproduces the Andromeda myth of rescue. She asserts:

> That Caponsacchi is a Perseus/St. George figure tells the reader to believe in his goodness; that she is likened to Andromeda confers upon Pompilia blameless victimhood. When regarded in this way Browning's interpretation of the myth reenacts a Victorian melodrama . . . complete with gender stereotypes. (Andromeda's Chains 140)

Yet even a cursory examination of the narrative of the poem suggests that it hardly subscribes unproblematically to either the larger genre of romance or the traditional narrative pattern of the rescue of helpless female by manly deliverer. The Ring and the Book undercuts the genre of romance in two basic ways. The first, briefer instance, is the contrast between the romantic representation that Pompilia's foster mother gives her daughter's prospective marriage to Guido, and its reality. Violante tells Pompilia that she will marry a "cavalier," conjuring up an image of chivalric rescue shared with her girlfriend Tisbe. The image proves to have nothing in common with the man who presents himself:

> And when the next day the cavalier who came
> (Tisbe had told me that the slim young man

> With wings at head, and wings at feet, and sword
> Threatening a monster, in our tapestry,
> Would eat a girl else,--was a cavalier)--
> When he proved Guido Franceschini,--old
> And nothing like so tall as I myself,
> Hook-nosed and yellow in a bush of beard . . . . (389-96)

One might conclude, however, that this undercutting of romantic expectations comes from bad casting, or tyrannical social custom, so the same scenario of rescue is tried later in the narrative with a much likelier candidate.

Giuseppe Caponsacchi lacks wings at head and feet, but as a slim, young, and good-looking nobleman he is much more apt for the part of cavalier. On close inspection, however, he is hardly a dashing man of action. On being informed that the woman whose appearance at a festival he found so striking is beaten by her husband, he decides to remove himself from the situation by leaving for Rome. The initiative for the "rescue" is taken entirely by Pompilia herself, and even so he dithers for two days before going through with it.[10] His first words to her, as she reports them, suggest a passivity incongruous in a masterful rescuer: "I am yours" (1447). The impression of Caponsacchi's fundamental passivity is borne out by the only really dramatic moment in the whole failed "rescue," which occurs after Guido overtakes them and brings the Commissary and guards to Pompilia's chamber. Pompilia, as part of her overall rhetorical strategy, minimizes the extent of her action in the incident, describing her rage at seeing Guido her "master, by hell's right" and Caponsacchi her "angel helplessly held back," euphemistically congratulating herself that she "did for once see right, do right, give tongue / The adequate protest," and ascribing her initiative to an "impulse to serve God" (1586, 1587, 1591-2, 1600). Caponsacchi, however, relates the specifics she glosses over:

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[10] Pompilia, emphasizing as she does her passivity, does not recount this latter aspect of the narrative,--at ll. 1450ff. she elides the days of hesitation--but Caponsacchi, whose name suggests his emasculation and who bemoans throughout his monologue that he has been "ineffective help" to Pompilia, does. He also records her reproach of him and her firm conscription of him to do her will, even though he has come resolved to refuse her (VII.1952, 1050ff.). Although I do not pursue this avenue further, "Giuseppe Caponsacchi" provides ample evidence of Pompilia's persuasive ability, and suggests that she has scripted him into her understanding of their respective roles in the central incident of The Ring and the Book.

> She started up, stood erect, face to face
> With the husband: back he fell, was buttressed there
> By the window all a-flame with morning-red,
> He the black figure, the opprobious blur,
> Against all peace and joy and light and life.
> "Away from between me and hell!"--she cried:
> . . . .
> I may have made an effort to reach her side
> From where I stood i' the doorway,--anyhow
> I found the arms, I wanted, pinioned fast,
> Was powerless . . . .
> . . . .
> She sprung at the sword that hung beside him, seized,
> Drew, brandished it, the sunrise burned for joy
> O' the blade, "Die," cried she, "devil, in God's name!"
> Ah, but they all closed round her . . . . (VI.1523-1547)[11]

The second gesture at romance in The Ring and the Book then, is a great failure, both in terms of the cavalier's conduct and in its practical consequences, even though Pompilia insists that it was a rescue--"I will not have the service fail! / I say, the angel saved me: I am safe!"-- by redefining the terms: "'T was truth singed the lies / And saved me, not the vain sword nor weak speech!" (1642-43, 1626-27). Yet even here, the "truth" to which she refers is her own deed in striking at Guido. Thus, far from being a reinscription of the romantic paradigm with a hidden agenda of inequality exposed in Aurora Leigh, The Ring and the Book presents what amounts to a parody of romantic rescue conventions. If any salvation occurs in the poem, it is a mutual one.[12] As Brady suggests, it is patronizing to disregard the Pope and Caponsacchi's estimations of Pompilia's heroism as mere chivalry (9).

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[11] The first line of this passage contains an unmistakable echo of the twenty-second of Barrett Browning's Sonnets from the Portuguese, which begins "When our two souls stand up erect and strong, / Face to face . . . ." The parallel creates an association between the sense of self that allowed Barrett Browning to envisage a marriage of equals, and the strength that permits Pompilia to resist a marriage of inequality and abuse.

Pompilia does speak at the center of the Ring and the Book. Considered in terms of the engagement with the woman question exhibited by the other texts examined in this study, Robert Browning's great work, the greatest poetical work of the Victorian age according to many, takes on a rather different cast. Despite its archaic setting, and despite the more philosophical concerns which have claimed the critical limelight, The Ring and the Book is as thoroughly engaged with the controversy over women as Aurora Leigh, and addresses many of the same questions using formal strategies similar to the poems which are the focus of this study. On the level of narrative, The Ring and the Book addresses the position of a disenfranchised wife, battered and abused by a husband whose rights are buttressed by Church and State alike. Despite her cultural and political powerlessness, Pompilia defies those powers, and although her bid for freedom fails, her husband is brought to justice for his murderous insistence that she is a piece of property rather than a person. Furthermore, the poem's exploration of the viability of romance as an emancipatory form creates a parodic rescue plot which is driven by female rather than male agency. Pompilia's agency functions like a narrative sub-text which is suppressed by the discourse of female passivity which she deploys to construct her defence. This discourse, like the other discourses in the poem, is emphatically cultural rather than natural, and traceable to the position of the speaker in a particular location in the social nexus at a specific historical moment.

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[12] See in Brady 8-9, drawing on Flavia Alaya and Dorothy Mermin, for a discussion on how Barrett Browning helped revise Browning's earlier conceptions of rescue, and passim on the mutuality of the rescue (and larger relationship) of Pompilia and Caponsacchi.

Dorothy Mermin has argued that poems such as _The Ring and the Book_ "rigidly adhere to conventional gender roles for women; imagine . . . a Pompilia who can write" ("Genre and Gender" 9). If we read Pompilia as agent both of the flight from Guido and of her own monologue, not only does it become possible that she can read and write, but the "conventional gender roles" readers of the poem have criticized are revealed as cultural and culturally enforced codes rather than natural behavior. In fact, _The Ring and the Book_ partakes to some degree of the broader generic strategies and shifts considered in the previous chapters. As narrative poetry it deconstructs the cultural myth of romance which would uphold conventional categories and definitions of gender. As dramatic poetry or closet drama it emphasizes the way agency and identity are contingent on social possibilities, and rejects the notion of a transcendent subjectivity. And Pompilia's voice within her own dramatic monologue effects some of the same representational strategies by which poems such as _Aurora Leigh_, "Armgart," or "A Castaway" inscribe female literary subjectivity. Most of all, the multi- and trans-generic aspect of _The Ring and the Book_--Richards misses the point when he deduces from this an attempt to "elude the aesthetic categories of genre" (93)--dialogizes the poem, and makes it what critics have begun increasingly to call it, a novel (e.g. Brady). It is foremost a novel in the Bakhtinian sense that it foregrounds the social imbrication, cultural contestation, and transformability of discourse. This is why the poem finally, paradoxically, both asserts Pompilia as agent of her discourse and narrative, and inscribes her as victim of social discourse and narrative; she is both literary subject as speaking subject and cultural object of her own and others' discourse. The paradox, as I have suggested throughout this study, is one that inheres in the historical moment which saw the emergence of a female political subject in Victorian Britain.

This reading is not to suggest that Pompilia is necessarily adulterous, untruthful, or even literate. Convincing arguments remain on both sides. I am also not posing a certain reading of "Pompilia" as either definitive or exclusively correct. Rather, the foregoing discussion illustrates my view that gendered conventions of reading, common to the historical setting of The Ring and the Book, the Victorian context of its production and publication, and its twentieth-century critical context, have shaped and unnecessarily foreclosed readings of this text, of Victorian poetry, and, conceivably, or numerous other texts. The conscription of Pompilia into a narrative of feminine victimization represents a gratuitous reinscription of gendered values which were actually under serious debate within the historical conditions within which the text materialized. A realization that the cultural and literary conventions underlying such interpretation are actually more fluid and conflicted than hitherto recognized opens up the possibility of readings which recognize the active participation of texts in historical debate and social change.

Such readings of literary history have been virtually absent from the study of Victorian poetry. As Avrom Fleishman has observed, even studies of the last decade such as Carol Christ's Victorian and Modern Poetics focus on "theoretical and stylistic continuities, without once considering the rest of creation as it might affect the poets and their ideas" (363). However, although Fleishman signals his awareness of feminist criticism and makes occasional reference to Barrett Browning, he implies that "the young men who were to become Victorian poets" comprise the entire class (371). Gender and the debates and transformations it underwent in the Woman Question, do not enter Fleishman's anticipated history of Victorian poetic genres. His assertion that "the Victorians may have achieved a form of social critique--with a carefully obscured but still legible reference--in . . . the making of fresh poems in new, or newly rededicated genres" is welcome, as is his insistence that studies of Victorian poetry are "badly in need of anchoring in the social facts and ideological currents of the age" (374, 367). But it is necessary to remember how thoroughly imbricated with questions of gender both the "social facts and ideological currents" of the Victorian period were, and to insist on an understanding of genre which takes gender into account.

My tracings of the implications of shifts and transformations in a few generic groups indicate the need for a more thorough account of how genre functions in Victorian poetry. We need histories of generic groups and generic change that affirm the interdependence of gender and genre, of literary and social change. Such an approach should not stop at a revitalized account of generic change in the Victorian period which takes gender, class, and other significant debates and struggles into account; it should deal also with Victorian criticism, which is saturated with pronouncements on gender and class, and consider the interaction between these assumptions and literary production and reception; it would deal with the politics of canon formation then and now, and inquire into the interrelations of literary values and social categories. A revisioning of Victorian literary history along these lines would include crucial aspects of the gender/genre nexus that I have not been able to address directly here, such as the areas of reception, nineteenth-century reader response, and Victorian poetics.[13]

Engendered Genre: A Subject in Process

This study clearly extends beyond the realm of Victorian poetry in the suggestions and questions it poses regarding the interrelatedness of genre and gender and the significance of generic change. Such change, as I have indicated throughout, has considerable implications not just for literary history and how one conducts literary criticism and study, but for an understanding of the connection between literary and social change. I have adopted a psychoanalytic model as the most useful account of how language affects and effects human beings, and have posed the categories of the "subject" and, more particularly, literary subjectivity, as mediating terms between the "literary" and the "social." The implications of this approach to theories of genre can be clarified by contrast to Alistair Fowler's recent suggestions on the future of genre theory. I both concur with Fowler's assertion that genre theory has moved beyond "empirical listings of generic repertoires" and emphatically welcome his assertion that "Accepting that genres are cultural objects, we can go on to ask how they work" ("Future of Genre Theory" 296). Yet his conception of how genres are "cultural" and the kind of "work" they perform is limited; he implies that literature is a distinct order which somehow "reflects" vague "social changes" such as "increased flows of information and decreased attention span" (293).

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[13] Alan Sinfield's Tennyson, Thaïs Morgan's "Mixed Metaphor, Mixed Gender: Swinburne and the Victorian Critics," and Carol Christ's "The Feminine Subject in Victorian Poetry" all represent important discussions of the gendered field of Victorian poetics.

According to Fowler, genres apparently change according to some inner logic which has no reference to the social and, in fact, turns out to be no change at all. Thus "new genres . . . will probably be genres originated through familiar processes of development. In this sense, at least, there is nothing new under the generic sun" ("Future of Genre Theory" 295).

Generic work and generic change are immeasurably broader and more dynamic than Fowler's essay allows. Rather than operating at a distance from the social, somehow both reflective and independent of it, genre is thoroughly, interconstitutively, enmeshed in the social. Accordingly, genre is necessarily involved in the construction and maintenance of the gendered systems of representation which constitute the subject within ideology. Fowler's mimetic notion of genre as "cultural" excludes recognition of the ideological work it performs; it also presumably relegates gender to the realm of "content" alone. In contrast, the notion of literary subjectivity enables, and even requires, an inquiry into the ideological functions and effects of genre. Indeed, I conclude the interpellation of literary subjectivity is one of the primary ideological functions of genre.

Drawing on the analogy proposed in Chapter One that genre is to the formation of the literary subject as language is to the constitution of the Lacanian subject, my textual analysis has paid particular attention to the representations of subjectivity constructed by a text's formal features. The notion of a literary "subjectivity," as opposed to a potential "subject position" offered by the text, for example, retains a sense of process and continuity, even slippage, between literary and lived subjectivities. In other words, a text does not simply "invite" a freely choosing reader to occupy a certain position represented within the text; rather, there exists a much more dialectical relation between text and reader which produces a continuum of effects ranging from coercion to consent to rejection.[14] The notion of literary subjectivity I am proposing here could be refined through further inquiry into the relationship between reading subjects and literary texts at particular historical moments. For example, the eponymous Romantic literary subjectivity constituted in Aurora Leigh differs dramatically from that represented by Pompilia in The Ring and the Book. Given my suggestion that they both constitute speaking and acting female literary subjects, it would be fruitful to articulate and analyze the different possibilities for reader interaction that "Pompilia" offers in contrast to the verse-novel which prompted in Susan B. Anthony a strong personal investment in and fairly straight-forward identification with the subjectivity Aurora represents. The analysis here of a variety of texts and genres provisionally suggests that the effects of literary subjectivities may range from creating "intersubjective" encounters which intervene to modify a reader's experience, to providing models which the reader would like to become, to coercively interpellating that form of subjectivity in the reading subject.

This latter notion that literary texts may interpellate subjects of course relies on an assumption that subjects, though always already constituted in language and ideology, are not formed in one seminal instant, but continuously, within an ongoing process that allows for change. As Judith Butler points out, it is false to assume that "to be constituted by discourse is to be determined by discourse, where determination forecloses the possibility of agency" (143). The interconnections between social change and generic transformations in Victorian poetry indicate that there is room within these interconstitutive processes for agency and intervention. Of course genre, like language, as a means by which perceptions are formed and subjects constituted in their relations to the world, resists change; as the Princeton Dictionary of Poetry and Poetics puts it "The ideal of literary emulation is one of the greatest Western ideals and of immeasurable social utility" (Preminger 779). Yet language alters, as does genre, and thus also the subjects thereby constituted; changed subjects can intervene to produce change in both discursive and material conditions, which again transforms subjects.

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[14] Paul Smith elaborates this principle: "specific subject-positions, each a small datum in subjectivity, cannot necessarily be predicted as the outcome of specific discourses. . . . [E]ach interpellation has to encounter, accommodate, and be accommodated by a whole history of remembered and colligated subject-positions. Thus it is perfectly possible that interpellation should be resisted--that it should fail, simply" (37).

The notion of a subject produced through literary change recalls Julia Kristeva's theory of a revolution in poetic language.[15] Kristeva posits literature as "the most explicit realization of the signifying subject's condition," and locates in the poetry of nineteenth-century France a revolution in poetic language based on "a practice involving the subject's dialectical state in language" (82). Signification, in her terms always involves the "thetic" principle, which "relies on already existing codes and conventions, necessarily confirming rather than questioning them" (Grosz, Sexual Subversions 51). For Kristeva, few texts are able to overcome the conservative force of the thetic: "Among the capitalist mode of production's numerous signifying practices, only certain literary texts of the avant-garde (Mallarmé, Joyce) manage to cover the infinity of the process, that is, reach the semiotic chora, which modifies linguistic structures" (88). She explicitly excludes the types of conflicts, disruptions, and transformations of genre that have been the focus of this study, as belonging to a narrative signifying practice which is inherently conservative.

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[15] I do not claim here to deal with all the intricacies of a complex theory of signification; rather, I choose to highlight the aspects of Kristeva's theory that are most pertinent to my argument. All parenthetical references to Kristeva, unless otherwise noted, are to Revolution in Poetic Language.

"In narrative," Kristeva argues, "the social organism is dominated, ruled by, and finally reduced to or viewed through the structure of the family" (90). The mode of narrative therefore reiterates familial structures of subjectivity, which are closely related to what I have been referring to as the unified Romantic subject: "The matrix of enunciation in narrative tends to center on an axial position that is explicitly or implicitly called 'I' or 'author'--a projection of the paternal role in the family" (91). "Narrative" is thus in Kristeva's view a highly regulative form of signifying practice in which the semiotic has scant chance of disrupting the thetic text. Accordingly, she considers the generic difference between epic, novel, or newspaper column insignificant:

> Differences between these "genres" are due to variations in the social organism and hence the latter's constraints, as well as to certain transformations of the matrices of enunciation. But these variations do not fundamentally disturb the enunciation's disposition; they merely indicate that meaning has been constituted and has taken shape at different levels of the same system. (92)

Poetic language, by contrast, is an intervention in the symbolic erupting from the semiotic; although such disruptions do not modify the symbolic order as such, they create gaps, breaks, and silences in the ordering system which disclose the role of material language and the semiotic process in its production. The results of this signifying practice of "poetic language" are revolutionary in terms of what

Kristeva defines as the "social function of texts: the production of a different kind of subject, one capable of bringing about new social relations" (105). In the event of a revolution in poetic language such as Kristeva describes, recurrent disruptions of the symbolic serve to create a new speaking subject, and through that subject a modification in the social order.

Critiques of Kristeva's theories regarding the relation between signification and subject are well known.[16] The most pertinent here are her apparently exclusive privileging of the avant-garde as the only effective form of textual intervention, and the tendency, particularly in her later work, to reify the symbolic into a static conceptual system of law and order. Yet Kristeva's account of a revolution in poetic language deserves consideration insofar as it attempts a materialist grounding of literary change similar to that I have undertaken, and theorizes the results of such change in terms of the constitution of a new subject.

Kristeva is careful to link the literary revolution of which she writes to the literary productions and material conditions of nineteenth-century France. How, if at all, would her theory apply to Victorian Britain? Although there were certainly differences between the two countries, there was also considerable continuity in terms of fundamental modes of production and ideological orientations. One could retain Kristeva's valorization of "poetic language" and attempt to substantiate that the most salient conditions occurred somewhat later in England, and--leaving aside the question of cross-channel influences--

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[16] Both Grosz in Sexual Subversions and Paul Smith in Discerning the Subject provide summaries of the critiques which are most commonly directed at her work, and the continuities and discrepancies between early work such as Revolution in Poetic Language and later work such as that on abjection in Powers of Horror.

eventually produced the linguistic innovations of Swinburne and others, and later on modernists such as Joyce. Or one could argue, along the lines of Alan Sinfield, that the same dynamic of poetic language manifested itself somewhat differently in Victorian poetry.[17] Yet it is also possible that the generic flux I have been tracing in Victorian poetry before the fin-de-siècle, although the transgressions and transformations manifest themselves in units larger than the poetic disruptions Kristeva celebrates and affect larger fields than grammatical structure, performs a similar function to that she describes.

This notion is not as incompatible with Kristeva's analysis as it might seem. As I have said, Kristeva has been widely criticized for overprivileging avant-grade literary technique that, in the words of Elizabeth Grosz, "seems a luxury only those [i.e. men] with a stable, guaranteed subject position can afford" (Lacan 164). However, Kristeva does leave room for other types of textual disruption than poetic language. She asserts that "crises of meaning, subject, and structure . . . . are inherent in the signifying function and, consequently in sociality," and therefore "may assume other forms in the West as well as in other civilizations" (Desire in Language 125). Furthermore, there are continuities between the processes she associates with poetic language and the types of generic transformation I have identified in Victorian poetry. The revolutionary effects of poetic language, in Kristeva's view, are produced by three processes: metaphor, metonymy, and "the passage from one sign system to another." The latter process she names "inter-textuality" or "transposition," which "involves an altering of the thetic position--the destruction of the old position and the formation of a new one" (59-60). This is Kristeva's version of Bakhtinian dialogism. The repeated fusion of such intertextuality or dialogism with the generic changes evident in the texts I have considered suggests that disruptions in genre perform a function similar to poetic language. This in turn suggests once again that genre functions for the constitution of the literary subject in much the same way that language does for the subject of psychoanalysis, and that generic innovation thus disrupts the naturalizing functions of representations of social structures.

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[17] Sinfield considers Tennyson's dramatic monologues "an alternative way of pursuing Mallarmé's project of effacing himself from his own language, of acknowledging the impossibility of the unified self and the motivated sign," although he interprets this project rather differently than Kristeva (Tennyson 112)

One of Kristeva's important contributions is her productive fusion of Bakhtin's notion of dialogism with a psychoanalytic theory of the subject. This study has traced a general novelization of poetic genres engaged with the Woman Question in the transformation of the narrative poem into the verse-novel, the inscription of feminist issues in the form of closet drama, and the dialogizing tendencies of the dramatic monologue. Kristeva's description of such dialogism as crucial to the revolutionary function of poetic language in the creation of a new subject thus parallels the convergence of generic flux and emergent female subjectivity I have traced in Victorian poetry. Kristeva never really specifies the sujet en procès [subject-in-process/on trial] which emerges from the literary revolution she describes. She does, however, pose her theory of that revolution in terms of connection to social changes in the later nineteenth century. She elsewhere discusses the immense ramifications of the rise of what could be described as a liberal or equality-based feminism during this period:

> The political demands of women; the struggles for equal pay for equal work, for taking power in social institutions . . . all are part of the logic of identification with certain values . . . . [T]he benefits which this logic of identification and the ensuing struggle have achieved and continue to achieve for women (abortion, contraception, equal pay, professional recognition, etc.); these have already had or will soon have effects even more important than those of the Industrial Revolution. ("Women's Time" 193-94)

The rise of feminism, this suggests, was one of the most influential social changes in nineteenth-century France. The way that the Woman Question interweaves with virtually every major social debate and transformation in Victorian Britain indicates that the influence of early feminism made itself felt just as strongly across the Channel. One likely candidate for Kristeva's unspecified category of the subject-in-process is thus an emergent feminist political subject such as that traced in this study. This may be something of a willful misreading or appropriation of Kristeva's theory, since in her terms women's relation to signification, subjectivity, and participation in the symbolic order is more problematic than the above passage would suggest.[18] Yet the Victorian dialectic between literary and social change involving contested representations of women indicates the emergence of a new type of female subject. This subject is a feminist subject who is both constituted in the symbolic order and yet attempts to question and challenge that order, through both speech and action, in terms of its construction of her and her world.

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[18] Interestingly, Kristeva considers that feminism of the second wave, which seeks to give language to intrasubjective and corporeal experiences left out by culture, is related, at least in aspiration, to "all major projects of aesthetic and religious upheaval," including, presumably, revolution in poetic language ("Women's Time" 194). Yet her rare pronouncements on experimental writing by women suggest that such aspiration cannot be realized. She muses in an interview contemporaneous with Revolution in Poetic Language that "In women's writing, language seems to be seen from a foreign land; is it seen from the point of view of an asymbolic, spastic body? Virginia Woolf describes suspended states, subtle sensations and, above all, colors--green, blue--, but she does not dissect language as Joyce does" ("Oscillation between Power and Denial" 166).

A useful model for the type of intervention in or critique of the symbolic order practiced by this type of subject is offered by Myra Jehlen. Far from arguing that the feminist subject can escape the conceptual systems of Western thought and therefore the symbolic order, Jehlen suggests that there is no "outside," but that nevertheless effective interventions in that order can take place by placing the "fulcrum" of the critique at various locations within the system to dislodge others. The intervention of feminist repealers in the social scientific discourse, in which they had substantial investments in terms of class, in order to shift the terms according to which sexuality was regulated is a case in point. This notion of feminist praxis could clearly be related to Kristeva's notion of the new subject which results from the revolution in poetic language as "in process", a shifting and multiple subjectivity as opposed to a fixed identity. Yet this feminist subject also has allegiances to more traditional forms of Romantic subjectivity.

Cora Kaplan has persuasively criticized a particular branch of feminist literary scholarship which she terms "feminist humanism" for taking as its main goal the "repair and restitution of female subjectivity" through analysis of literary texts which themselves entrench the romantic theory of the subject ("Pandora's Box" 149). My analysis of the representation of female subjectivity in Victorian poetry here arises from an interest in how that theory of the subject and the literary forms which underwrote its construction were mobilized by and in turn helped to create female political subjects in the later Victorian period. Furthermore, it seems that the conditions of this historical moment, and in particular the ambivalent relation that women necessarily had to Romantic subjectivity, produced an articulation of a female subject which was also constantly splitting and shifting its allegiances to include multiple identifications which do not fall under the rubric of the unified humanist subject. The cross-class identifications of the middle-class female repealers, for example, created a stance which simultaneously cited the "pure" woman's claim to speech as a rational subject, and the "fallen" woman's subjection to and exclusion from the political order to which middle-class women could claim access.

My interest in the development of a feminist political subject has its foundation in a desire to locate and specify agency within the historical processes of literary and social change, though I cannot claim to have resolved a question which is the stumbling-block of much contemporary theory. What I have done is to demonstrate these processes as interdependent and interconstitutive, and to locate the subject as catalyst in their interaction. This is not at all to argue for complete human agency, but simply to assert that systems change through human use, rather than through fiats, mechanisms, or magic. One of the questions raised by the parallel with Kristeva's model is whether this feminist subject is necessarily constituted by disruptions in Victorian poetic genres. That remains for future study. What this study does suggest, however, is that the questioning of categories of and definitions of gender in literary works, manifested in Victorian poetry as the Woman Question, is necessarily accompanied by disruption and transformation of genres.

I have also presented a narrative of origins that takes up some of the most pressing issues in contemporary feminist debate. Yet despite the dangers of nostalgia and projection, looking to histories, though they be constructed in terms of present questions, is one of few tools available for evaluating the theories, events, and possibilities of the present. Some of the dilemmas around theorizing feminist subjectivity and the problem of agency derive from contradictions which were also felt at the inception of a broadly-based middle-class political and representational feminist activism. Reading the past for the efficacy and limitations of specific strategies not only helps to clarify contemporary dilemmas, but refines understandings of the historical processes which resist and enable change.

"Engendering Genre" traces a continuity between the literary subjectivity inscribed in the transformations of several poetic genres and the appearance of a middle-class female political subject in later Victorian Britain, one whose subjectivity partakes of multiple, provisional, and tactical formulations of the female subject, rather than any single static position. It remains to future study to further specify the relationship between these forms of subjectivity and the particular debates, actions, and moments within which they subsisted.[19] I have suggested throughout that the interpellations of the female subject in these texts as somehow "split" balances or offsets some of the conservative implications of concurrent inscriptions of a unified humanist female subject which has been and may perhaps remain historically necessary as a prerequisite for political intervention. The question persists, however, of what significance to attach to this articulation of a divided subject. Is it, for example, the result of equality-based humanist feminism? In these terms, the greatest social crime against women could be viewed as an "unnatural" rending or maiming, through the imposition of sex roles and gender disabilities, of a "naturally" unified subject. Or does, as I have in places suggested, a realization of the social constructedness of "women" lead to a sense that the liberal humanist subject is a fallacy/phallusy, and that the subject is always contingent and divided against itself within a web of discourse and social constructions it cannot transcend. My study has leaned towards the latter view rather than the former, yet future study will need to take up in greater detail such issues as the complexities of Victorian female subjectivity, its relation to literary subjectivity, and its placement in relation to, for example, Kristeva's notion of the sujet en procès or other models of post-modern female subjectivity.

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[19] My sense of the possibilities for shifting allegiances and strategies within the category of the "subject" owes much to Judith Butler's persuasive conclusion to Gender Trouble. See also Paul Smith.

Further work remains to be done: in revisionary studies of Victorian poetry and its convergence with the Woman Question; in exploring the role of genre in the interpellation of gendered subjects; in specifying the role of the subject at the intersection of textual and social change; in analyzing the imbrication of sexuality and textuality both at specific historical junctures and within the larger signifying practices of Western culture. For the (en)gendering of genres, of literary and political histories, and of feminisms are all subjects in process.

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